Gertrud the Great of Helfta

The Herald of God's Loving Kindness

Book 4

Translated by Alexandra Barratt

VISIT…

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"Having now translated the first four books of *Herald of God's Loving Kindness*, Alexandra Barratt has made an invaluable contribution to studies on Gertrud the Great and the women religious at Helfta. Barratt's introduction and notes helpfully elucidate the role of liturgy and music especially central in this book of the *Herald*. Her translation achieves the delicate balance between being faithful to the singular charisma of Gertrud of Helfta and being accessible to the contemporary reader."

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GERTRUD THE GREAT OF HELFTA

THE HERALD OF GOD'S LOVING-KINDNESS

BOOK FOUR

Translated and Introduced by Alexandra Barratt

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ABBREVIATIONS

CF	Cistercian Fathers series
Conf	Augustine, *Confessions*
LSG	Mechtild of Hackeborn, *Liber Specialis Gratiae*
SC	Bernard of Clairvaux, Sermons on the Song of Songs
SCh	Sources chrétiennes. Paris: Éditions du Cerf

INTRODUCTION

Gertrud the Great (1256–1302), to whose name the *Legatus Divinae Pietatis*, or, in English, *The Herald of God's Loving-Kindness*, is attached, was a German nun at the monastery of Helfta, situated in what is today Saxony-Anhalt, Germany.[1] Helfta was a powerful Benedictine house, Cistercian in its sympathies but not formally part of the Order: it is Saint Benedict whom Gertrud calls "our most holy father" (*Herald* IV.11.1[2]) and "glorious father Benedict" (IV.50.8), but while she has a special devotion to Bernard because of his writing skills, and his works, or those attributed to him, are quoted on many occasions, she does not otherwise single him out. Under Helfta's abbess Gertrud of Hackeborn, three of Helfta's members wrote mystical treatises: Mechtild of Hackeborn, author of the *Liber Specialis Gratiae*;[3] Gertrud (distinct from the abbess), source of the

1. On Helfta and its history, see Alexandra Barratt, trans. and annot., *Gertrud the Great of Helfta: The Herald of God's Loving-Kindness Books One and Two*, CF 35 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1991), 7–8; Alexandra Barratt and Debra L. Stoudt, "Gertrude the Great of Helfta," in *Medieval Holy Women in the Christian Tradition c. 1000–c. 1500,* ed. Alastair Minnis and Rosalynn Voaden (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010), 454–55; Josef Hochenauer, *Kloster Helfta: Raum schaffen für das Licht* (Bamberg: St Otto, 1999).

2. References to Book IV are to the present translation; references to Books One and Two are to Barratt, *The Herald: Books One and Two*, and references to Book Three to Alexandra Barratt, trans., *Gertrud the Great of Helfta: The Herald of God's Loving-Kindness: Book Three*, CF 63 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1999). References specifically to the Latin *Legatus* (the chapter and paragraph numbers of which are replicated in the translations) are to *Le Héraut*, ed. Pierre Doyère and others, SCh 25, 27, 225, and 331 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1968–1986).

3. *Revelationes Gertrudianae ac Mechtildianae* II, ed. L. Pacquelin (Paris: Oudin, 1877).

Legatus and possibly of the *Exercitia Spiritualia*;[4] and Mechtild of Magdebourg, a Beguine who late in life found refuge in the monastery, author of the vernacular *Fliessinde Licht der Gotteheit*. Gertrud wrote book 2 of *The Herald* "with her own hand" (*Herald*, II.Prol.). A close confidante, now known as "Sister N,"[5] composed book 1, a biographical memoir. Sister N also recorded, compiled, and edited book 3, a loosely organized collection of revelations received by Gertrud on various occasions and on various topics; book 4, of which the present volume is a modern English translation; and book 5, an account of the deathbeds of various Helfta nuns and other people associated with the community, including Abbess Gertrud and both Mechtilds.

Gertrud's earthly life was uneventful. Having entered the monastery as a child of four or five, she received an excellent medieval education in the trivium (Latin grammar, rhetoric, and dialectic) and possibly in the quadrivium (arithmetic, music, geometry, and astronomy). Originally indifferent to her vocation, which her family had chosen for her, in 1281 at the age of twenty-five she underwent a conversion and was thenceforward favored with numerous visions and mystical experiences, many of which focused on the heart of Jesus, in which "lie hidden most completely the incomprehensibilities of the divine nature" (IV.2.4). She never held conventual office but was renowned for her teaching, her composition of prayers and spiritual *florilegia*, and her role as spiritual advisor and intermediary with the divine. She was often sick and therefore unable to take her full part

4. *Gertrud the Great of Helfta: Spiritual Exercises*, trans., intro., notes, and indexes by Gertrud Jaron Lewis and Jack Lewis, CF 49 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1989).

5. See Balázs J. Nemes, "Text Production and Authorship: Gertrude of Helfta's *Legatus divinae pietatis*," in Elizabeth Andersen, Henrike Lähnemann, and Anne Simon, eds., *A Companion to Mysticism and Devotion in Northern Germany in the Late Middle Ages* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2014), 116–20; Almuth Märker and Balázs J. Nemes, "*Hunc tercium conscripsi cum maximo labore occultandi*: Schwester N von Helfta und ihre 'Sonderausgabe' des 'Legatus divinae pietatis' Gertruds von Helfta in der Leipziger Handschrift Ms 827," in *Beiträge zur Geschichte der deutschen Sprache und Literatur* 137 (2015): 248–96.

in the collective life and worship of the community. She died in 1302 in her mid-forties.[6]

Helfta's institutional life, in contrast, was turbulent and reflected the confused political environment in Germany of the second half of the thirteenth century. The monastery fell under an interdict at least once as a consequence of its financial problems. Situated deep in the Holy Roman Empire, it endured endemic uncertainty and surrounding lawlessness: this was a time when the emperor was weak and the local princes, both secular and ecclesiastical, strong. From 1254 to 1273, during Gertrud's formative years, there was actually an interregnum, with no widely accepted emperor; the ineffective Rudolf of Hapsburg held the position from 1273 to 1291, followed by Adolf of Nassau from 1291 until his deposition and death in 1298. Albert I, Rudolf's son, was then elected and was emperor until he too was deposed in 1308.

Structure of Book 4

In contrast to book 3, which has no obvious organizing principle, book 4 has an overt structure, though less artificial and rhetorical than that of book 1. Book 3 had emphasized the role that poor health played in Gertrud's life; book 4 brings together selections ("whatever seemed fitting") from the "spiritual consolations" that Gertrud received on various significant liturgical occasions when she was too sick to take part in the communal observances (IV.Prol.). She may, however, have been present in the monastic church, as we know that when she could not take part in the Office she would sometimes still go there to hear it sung (III.59.1). It is appropriate, therefore, that these "consolations" should be arranged largely in chronological order, according to the church's year. Most of the occasions on which they were experienced are major feasts of the church, saints' days, or particular Sundays identified by their respective introits, but some

6. The meager information that we possess about Gertrud's life is derived from *The Herald* itself. See further Barratt, *The Herald: Books One and Two*, 9–12; Barratt, *The Herald: Book Three*, 9–11.

of the revelations occur on weekdays related to important feasts, such as the Wednesday of Holy Week and the Monday and Tuesday following Pentecost.

Book 4 begins on December 23 (the day before the vigil of the Nativity of Our Lord), and the chapters then proceed in chronological order up to chapter 56 (Saint Elizabeth of Hungary, November 17). But chapter 57 records revelations communicated on August 28, the feast of Saint Augustine of Hippo, although they concern Saint Catherine of Alexandria, whose feast fell on November 25 in the Middle Ages. Chapter 58 takes place on the feast of the Dedication of the Church, the date of which is unknown if it refers to the monastic church, though it might refer to the feast of the Dedication of the Lateran basilica, which fell on November 9. The final chapter opens with an apparition of the Lord on the occasion of the consecration of the chapel; the year in which this took place is unknown, but we know from III.17.1 that the date was August 10, as it coincided with the feast of Saint Laurence. It is possible, then, to see the last two chapters as appendices, outside the framework of the rest of the book.

If revelations relating to a festival were received on more than one occasion, they are all gathered under the same date. IV.48, for instance, records four separate sets of revelations delivered on feasts of the Assumption in different years. In addition, revelations concerning some saints are granted on the feasts of others, so we have Saints Francis, Augustine, and Dominic associated with the feast of Saint Bernard, and further revelations concerning Saint Agnes communicated on the feast of Saint Augustine. In all, the compiler of book 4 shows a commendable ability to collate, control, and organize a large body of material that she must have acquired piecemeal and cumulatively over an extended period of time.

"Sister N"

Gertrud's anonymous editor, the hypothetical "Sister N," who later refers to herself as "the compiler of this book," is a noticeable presence in book 4. Not only does she organize this mass of disparate material,

but if necessary she annotates it. For instance, at IV.26.2 she provides a learned comment on modes of perception in mystical visions, with and without the aid of corporeal images, and the possible role played by angels, which includes a long quotation taken from Bernard of Clairvaux's sermons on the Song of Songs. This she probably quoted from memory, and she has adapted it to her own purposes. She also takes a role in trimming her material and then apologizing to the reader for doing so: there is much more that she could have recorded, but she does not wish to weary us, she explains. At Easter Gertrud receives very many spiritual insights that, Sister N states, "could greatly delight the soul of the devout reader; I am, however, omitting them all, and very many others too, for the sake of brevity, lest prolixity should engender distaste" (IV.27.5). Later, on the feast of the Dedication of the Church, she describes Gertrud anticipating the divine promise that "she would experience wonderful delight in spirit, of which much could be said that I have omitted in the interests of brevity" (IV.59.3).

Sister N therefore adopts the role of a privileged intermediary who grants or refuses access to Gertrud's experiences. As Balázs Nemes says, she "is guided by two main principles: readability in her arrangement of her material, and usefulness in its content."[7] For instance, just before the feast of the Ascension, Christ revealed himself to Gertrud "in the serenity of such great goodness and kindliness as cannot be expressed by any words, nor can it be grasped by human senses." Sister N immediately interposes to say, "But nonetheless let me say a few words, selected from many" (IV.35.2–3). Needless to say, the selection is hers: indeed, the whole of book 4, as she states in the Prologue, is Sister N's choice of "whatever seemed fitting."

Sister N's prose style is quite distinctive, and different from that of Gertrud. Although learned and correct, it is somewhat labored and not as fluent as Gertrud's as it appears in book 2. For some reason she prefers the imperfect (past continuous) tense to the perfect, even when she is describing a single rather than continuous action. In her

7. Nemes, "Text Production," 117.

choice of vocabulary, she sometimes repeats the same word, or with minor variations, several times in close proximity, where a modern reader would consider it awkward. At other times she seems intent on using a series of different words for what is essentially the same idea. Sometimes her choice of words is rare or obscure. Sister N also is both cautious and punctilious in conveying what Gertrud had told her and tries to avoid making baldly unqualified statements. For instance, she is always reluctant to state that Gertrud "saw" something and prefers to use more ambiguous expressions such as "it seemed to her" (the translation has not always preserved this feature, which can be irritating *in extenso*). And she likes to nuance her account of Gertrud's visions by using similes (introduced by "as if") rather than direct description and then sometimes further modifying them by phrases such as "as it were." The translation has mainly followed her in most of these stylistic decisions.

The Role of the Liturgy and of Music

Almost everyone who comments on Gertrud singles out the strongly liturgical basis of her spirituality.[8] Perhaps because book 4 focuses on the feasts and services of the church, the liturgy and liturgical texts are even more prominent here than in the other books of the *Legatus*. The text reveals how highly the community valued the liturgy and its proper performance. For instance, we are told how on one occasion, when the various liturgical duties for the week were allocated, there was some gentle competition among the nuns for the privilege of chanting "this or that responsory" and genuine disappointment among those who missed out (IV.2.12).

Many of the individual chapters are structured around the proper chants for the relevant feasts, with which Gertrud's revelations are often inextricably intertwined. Heavenly figures—Christ, the Virgin, or the saints—may join in or respond to the liturgy (e.g., IV.3.3 and 6;

8. See, for instance, Doyère, *Gertrude d'Helfta*, 52–54.

IV.12.5), and the choir of the monastic church at Helfta becomes just one part of a continuum that extends from the divine itself, through the citizens of heaven, down to the nuns on earth. It always includes Gertrud, who may be absent from choir but reciting her Office in the infirmary, on her own (sometimes in bed, IV.9.2), or with another sick nun (IV.35.2). Or the chants combine with the events of the feast they commemorate: on the feast of the Purification, for instance, the words of the chant merge with a vision of the Virgin, "sitting in glory with her son, the King of Kings," then of the presentation in the temple as recounted in Luke's gospel, then back to the Virgin, who orders the angelic hosts to guard the nuns present in choir as representing all those who "wholeheartedly desire that true religion should be perpetually preserved and increased in this place and everywhere" (IV.9.3–6). Sometimes the verses are directly related to a particular spiritual insight achieved by Gertrud (e.g., IV.3.7); in others, the chants function as mnemonic devices enabling the visionary to recall and transmit her experiences in great detail (in IV.2.1–3 and IV.9.1 the Matins bell performs this function).

Sometimes heavenly figures take part in a kind of sacred ballet in response to the Office: on one feast of the Assumption Gertrud sees the court of heaven rejoice together "with a wonderful dance of jubilation," bursting out in the Virgin's praise with the words of a response (IV.48.22); during Vespers on Trinity Sunday, the Father and Son both speak and honor the Virgin, while the community chants the psalms, with varying degrees of devotion (IV.41.1–3). During first Vespers for the feast of the Assumption, the Helfta choir becomes the stage for a divine oratorio, with the angels joining in a response with the community "in the joyous shout of heavenly delights," the Son intoning "in a deep voice" the opening of another chant, the Holy Spirit playing "the lyre of his divine heart," and the Virgin rising to extend her protection to the faithful (IV.48.8). Another year on the same feast, the Virgin is enthroned while the two choirs of angels and saints sing the chants alternately, joined by the Holy Spirit, the Son, and the Father in turn: at the climax the Virgin herself joins in

the singing of the *Te Deum* in praise of the Trinity (IV.48.9–13). As a revelation's content may be directly related to or inspired by the wording of chants used in the Office or Mass of the day, if Gertrud's amanuensis has provided only the first few words, the translation provides the full text of the chant for clarification (e.g., IV.9.3).

No discussion of the importance of the liturgy can ignore the enhanced role of music and musical imagery in book 4.[9] Gertrud loved music, to a fault, in her opinion. On Trinity Sunday the Lord chides her for this indulgence, explaining: "Weighed in the balance of justice, you have been deprived of inner delight of spiritual understanding because in yielding to your own will, you took human pleasure in the harmonious sound of the chant" (IV.41.5; see III.30.26).

In Gertrud's world, the inhabitants of heaven sing the liturgy alongside the religious on earth. On the feast of the Dedication of the Church, Gertrud witnesses the Father and the Son singing an unaccompanied vocal duet, the earliest examples of which appeared in the thirteenth century.[10] The Father sings the response at Matins in the treble while the Son takes the bass, singing "in the role of his human nature," and provides a kind of verbal counterpoint or faux-bourdon:

> The Son of God inserted one by one those words that the heart stricken with compunction ponders, that is: "Ah, alas! wretch that I am, how have I wasted time in ignoring the Lord God my lover," and the like. And the Son of God, in the role of his human nature, chanted this in deep tones, as if singing a sweet-sounding duet with God the Father, who was chanting most excellently through the music of the divine nature or in the treble, "*Behold the tabernacle of God with men.*" (IV.58.7)

9. Naoë Kukita Yoshikawa has recently highlighted the therapeutic use of music and the role of musical imagery in the LSG; see "Heavenly Vision and Psychosomatic Healing: Medical Discourse in Mechtild of Hackeborn's *The Booke of Gostlye Grace*," in *Medicine, Religion and Gender in Medieval Culture,* edited by Naoë Kukita Yoshikawa (Woodbridge, Suffolk: D. S. Brewer, 2015), 67–84.

10. Alison Latham, ed., *Oxford Companion to Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), s.v. *duet.*

Another time the Virgin Mary sings a solo when she joins in the celebration of her assumption and is serenaded by a choir of flowers: "all the flowers sent out from each and every petal . . . a bright and joyful sound, as if one could hear all the world's musicians chanting sweetest melody together. Then the blessed Virgin, as if exulting in her unmatched blessedness . . . , sang, "I shall greatly rejoice in the Lord" (IV.48.10).

Instrumental music is even more prominent in Gertrud's imaginary world than vocal music, and various musical instruments, both generic and specific, regularly appear in her visions, especially as metaphors and similes. On the feast of the Annunciation, Gertrud's soul receives a necklace with seven points, each of which symbolizes a virtue. Although this necklace is hard for the reader to visualize, in some way it becomes a musical instrument played by the Holy Spirit: "While the antiphon 'By wonderful skill' was being chanted at Terce, the Holy Spirit seemed to blow from the Lord's heart like a most gentle south wind. Sweetly playing with his most delightful breath on the seven jewels of that necklace that her soul was wearing before him as if they were a musical instrument, he was chanting that antiphon in praise of the highest Trinity" (IV.12.7).

Another time, while Gertrud is repeating a prayer over and over again, she sees that "each little verse was . . . being presented to the Lord in the form of some melodious musical instrument that pleased the Lord, and was praising and playing before him just as minstrels are accustomed to play at the banquet of nobles" (IV.35.10). Musical instruments occur in another simile when Gertrud apologizes to Saint Elizabeth of Hungary for concentrating her devotion on God rather than on the saint. Saint Elizabeth reassures her that "by this you soothe my state of mind the more sweetly just as a musical instrument pleases someone more than the bleating of sheep or lowing of cattle" (IV.56.1).

In these examples the phrase translated as "musical instrument" (*musicum instrumentum*) is generic. A more precise term, which in book 4 occurs only in chapter 41, is *cithara*. Used as a representation or manifestation of the divine Heart, this musical instrument apparently

has three strings—very common in medieval stringed instruments—is resonant, and sounds in the upper register. On Trinity Sunday,

> while they were intoning Vespers, the Son of God, holding in both hands his most kind and worthy heart, was presenting it to the sight of the glorious Trinity in the form of a stringed instrument. . . . Those who were concentrating on singing the praise of the worshipful Trinity with devotion were sounding through the most holy heart of Jesus as if in the higher register with a clear tone and most delightful sound. (IV.41.2; see III.26.3, and *Spiritual Exercises* 6, lines 425–26)

Later on the same feast, "the whole Trinity . . . was bending with most kindly condescension towards the heart of Jesus, which in the form of a stringed instrument was playing wonderfully and sounding sweetly. . . . On it <the Trinity> put three strings that should unceasingly, in accordance with the insuperable omnipotence of God the Father and the wisdom of God the Son and the benevolence of the Holy Spirit, make good every failing of hers to the pleasure of the most blessed Trinity" (IV.41.4).

Although *cithara* can mean both "harp" and "lute," this translation has chosen the generic "stringed instrument," as it is not clear exactly what Gertrud has in mind. As the verb used to describe the process of playing the *cithara* is *circumvolvere*, "to turn," it is probable that she was thinking of the *organistrum*. This stringed instrument consisted of a sound box with strings stopped by a keyboard attached to the cover and sounded by a roisined wheel operated by a handle.[11] But the organistrum is now obsolete, so the term would convey nothing to modern readers, while the alternative word that still survives, "hurdy-gurdy," would have the wrong associations, as it has gone down in the world and tends to be associated with "itinerant musicians, peasants, and blind beggars."[12]

11. Hortense Panum, *The Stringed Instruments of the Middle Ages: Their Evolution and Development,* trans. Jeffrey Pulver (London: William Reeves, 1939), 292–93.

12. Latham, *Oxford Companion to Music*, s.v. *hurdy-gurdy*.

The origins of the organistrum are debated, but the music historian Christopher Page has argued for the validity of "the traditional view—of a Western, monastic, origin," maybe in the eleventh century.[13] It was originally used by clerics "as a mechanised teaching device"[14] to learn previously unknown chants without the help of a teacher. It is therefore entirely possible that it was in use at Helfta, as the earliest evidence, Page says, "points to a northern origin, and the two earliest testimonies to Bavaria. The word *organistrum* may have been coined in Germany."[15] Furthermore, as we have seen, Gertrud compares the *cithara* to the divine heart. The sound box of the organistrum was guitar- or pear-shaped, so when it was held across the body to be played it could well have resembled the human heart, both in its positioning and in its general configuration. Finally, it may not be fanciful to associate the "tangents"—the keys that when depressed changed the pitch of the note produced by the cord—with the seven points of the necklace.

Another word for a stringed instrument used in the *Legatus* is *plectrum*. Literally this means the key that stopped the strings, but it is usually translated as "lyre." Here, though, it is probably another word for the organistrum, as once again the verb used to describe the act of playing it is *circumvolvere*, and again the instrument is used as an image for the divine heart. There are only two occurrences of *plectrum* in the whole of the *Legatus*, and both are in book 4. In one of the Assumption visions already mentioned, "The Holy Spirit seemed to play the stringed instrument [*plectrum*] of his divine heart to the praise and glory of the blessed Virgin Mary" (IV.48.8), while on the feast of Saint Bernard, the rays of the saint's teaching, penetrating the divine heart, "played on it wonderfully with most charming delight as if it were a stringed instrument [*plectrum*], and made resonate the sweetest sound of <the saint's> endeavors and especially of innocence and love" (IV.49.2).

13. Christopher Page, "The Medieval Organistrum 1: A Legacy from the East?" *Galpin Society Journal* 35 (1982): 37–44, here 40.

14. Christopher Page, "The Medieval Organistrum 2: Terminology," *Galpin Society Journal* 36 (1983): 71–87, here 83.

15. Page, "Medieval Organistrum 1," 42.

The word *lyra* makes a single appearance in book 4, the only time that it is used in the *Legatus*. Gertrud sees Saint Augustine's words, having been "ennobled" in the divine heart, poured back into his own heart: "That sweet flowing influx, flooding his soul to its innermost core and . . . playing it like a stringed instrument, seemed to resonate with sweetest harmony" (IV.50.2; cf. Gertrud, *Spiritual Exercises,* 6, lines 48–49). Although "lyre" is the obvious translation, it would be misleading here, as *lyra* seems to have been yet another name for the organistrum. So it seems possible that Gertrud regarded all three terms—*plectrum*, *cithara*, and *lyra*—as more or less equivalents for whatever stringed instrument she had in mind. The choice of words, however, is more likely to be the responsibility of Sister N, as none of them occurs in book 2 which Gertrud wrote herself. These three words might simply be variant translation choices for a vernacular word; indeed, as was mentioned earlier, one of the characteristics of Sister N's style is a weakness for "elegant variation," that is, a tendency to use several different words for what is essentially the same idea.

Book 4 mentions several more musical instruments. The word *organum*, "instrument, (pipe) organ," ambiguous in Latin as in English, appears four times. Typically, on Septuagesima Sunday Gertrud speaks to the Lord with nostalgia of a time when she was much stronger: "Ah, Lord, I have quite often chanted . . . with such great fervor that I thought myself caught up to stand before your throne of glory and make resound each word and note on your heart as on a most sweet instrument" (IV.14.1, see also IV.48.8, 50.9, and 51.2). Here the word clearly refers to a musical instrument. Elsewhere in book 4 it also appears in similes to describe the Lord's heart (see also *Legatus* III.25.1 and III.49). And it is worth noting that *organum* is the only word for a musical instrument that appears in book 2, when Gertrud herself writes, "With these words . . . I pay you what is your own by means of that sweet-sounding musical instrument [*organum*], your divine heart. Making it sound through the power of the Spirit Paraclete, I chant to you, Lord God" (II.23.16).

Another ambiguous term is *fistula*, which means "pipe" but can be either a wind instrument or a water pipe. But it is almost always modified by "golden," which suggests the former, and at least once by "sweet sounding" (IV.5.1). Sometimes the context makes it clear that a musical pipe is in question: on the feast of the Nativity of the Virgin, while Gertrud was concentrating on an antiphon at Compline, the Lord "promptly sent out as many golden pipes from his heart towards the heart of the virgin mother as the services that she wished she had shown his mother. Through each and every one of these pipes resounded the tenderness of filial love that the Lord Jesus felt deeply for his sweetest mother" (IV.51.7; see also III.26.2). (The "golden pipes" of IV.59.4, however, seem designed primarily to convey liquid rather than sound.)

Finally, bells appear several times in the text. Sometimes they are the convent bells that announce the Offices, but others must be musical bells. On the feast of the Circumcision, when Gertrud has been composing epithets to praise the holy Name, she sees these greetings appearing before the Lord, "hanging in the sky in the form of white roses, and from each rose hung a wonderfully tuneful little bell" (IV.5.1). Later, on the feast of the Purification, Gertrud sees "all the works that by the help of the omnipotence, wisdom, and goodness of God were accomplished in anyone" symbolized by "delightful little bells" (IV.2.7).

Gertrud's extensive musical imagery and careful choice of words, especially of *circumvolvere* to describe the process of playing a stringed instrument, suggest an informed interest in music, and probably a detailed practical knowledge of both the choral performance of the liturgy and of instruments that might have been used either for entertainment and recreation or for the musical education of the nuns. Certainly it is clear that she found in both vocal and instrumental music a rich source of images in her attempts to convey her mystical insights. At the same time, the way in which these images are used is often startling and, coming from someone whose writings are characterized by vivid imagery, surprisingly hard for the reader to actually visualize.

Gertrud and Numbers

Gertrud may well have studied the theory of music, as well as its practical applications, as part of her academic education. As one of the subjects of the quadrivium, it was closely connected with arithmetic, or number theory, and like many medieval visionaries Gertrud had an interest in significant numbers.[16] There are several references in book 4 to prayers or devotions that are to be repeated a number of times with symbolic value. On one feast of the Annunciation, the Virgin instructs Gertrud "to recite forty-five Hail Marys devoutly every day during the octave, in memory of those days during which Jesus grew in her womb" (IV.12.10). Reciting the prayers over six days (omitting both the feast day itself and the Octave) would give a total of two hundred and seventy days, or thirty-eight and a half weeks, close enough to forty weeks, the average length of human gestation. On another feast of the Virgin, appropriately her Nativity, Gertrud "had recited the same number of Hail Marys as the days that the illustrious Star of the Sea had grown in her mother's womb" (IV.51.1). We are not told how many days that was, but in one Latin manuscript an early marginal note reads, "that is, 276,"[17] possibly influenced by the Virgin's revelation to Mechtild, recorded in the LSG, that she had spent 277 days in her mother's womb.[18] Such repetitions could be quite onerous: on one feast of the Assumption, Gertrud could not, "as she wished to do, recite completely in honor of the most blessed Virgin as many Hail Marys as the number of years she had lived on earth" (IV.48.1); depending on her source, this might be fifty-nine or sixty-three or sixty-six repetitions.

Book 4 also contains the only reference in the *Legatus* to the total number of Christ's wounds, a figure that preoccupied many medieval visionaries, including Mechtild. Estimates varied considerably. We are told that, in preparation for the feast of the Ascension,

16. See also Barratt and Stoudt, "Gertrude the Great of Helfta," 461–62.
17. Vienna, Österreichische National Bibliothek, cod. 4224.
18. LSG I.29.

Gertrud recited a short prayer in praise of the Trinity 5,466 times in honor of Christ's wounds (IV.35.1). Another significant figure that appears several times in Gertrud's texts is 225, which she apparently regarded as the number of the parts (*membra*) of the human body. (Her source for this, if any, remains unknown.) In book 4 we are told that she recited Mechtild's prayer to the Trinity, "I praise, I adore," "225 times on behalf of all the parts of her body" (IV.2.7). At other times, "divinely inspired, she read 225 times, on behalf of all her members, this verse from the gospel: 'Not my will but yours be done, most loving Jesus' " (IV.23.10); recited the acclamation, *Ave, Jesu, sponse floride, in jubilo quo ascendisti saluto et collaudo te*, the same number of times (IV.35.10; see III.45.2 n. 2); and in honor of Saint Bernard "began to recite 225 times the psalm 'Praise the Lord, all people' " (IV.49.3). Two hundred twenty-five is the square of fifteen, and Gertrud probably knew this, as Boethius, whose *De Arithmetica* was the standard medieval textbook on the subject, deals with square numbers in book 2, chapters 10–12, though without attributing any particular significance to them.

Metaphors: The Holy Roman Empire and The Court

Gertrud's writings are full of vivid images, often beautiful and sometimes bizarre. But they are far from merely decorative: once when she worried that the Lord had presented her with what she considered as an inferior "corporeal" vision, he gently chided her, explaining that "spiritual and invisible things can only be expressed to human understanding through comparisons with the familiar. And so no one should despise anything represented by images of corporeal things" (IV.12.3). Many of these images are drawn from "the noble life"—rich and elaborate clothing, personal ornaments of many kinds such as necklaces, pendants, precious jewels, enameled brooches, heraldic badges, and even plaques of gold: all the trappings of the medieval courts.

It is ironic that at such a time of imperial weakness Gertrud's text makes so much use of imagery and language specifically related to the emperor, his court, and his power. This is particularly prominent

in book 4: forms of *imperium*, *imperialis*, *imperator*, and *imperatrix* occur only once in book 1, twice in book 2, and seven times each in books 3 and 5, but there are nearly two dozen examples in book 4 alone. Possibly many of the experiences recorded in this book took place around 1291 and/or 1298, when the death or deposition of one emperor and the election of another would have been uppermost in the minds of the nuns. We do know that Gertrud, like the rest of the convent, was concerned with imperial politics. Her biographer records as one of her miracles that after Rudolf's death in 1291 the community was praying for the election of his successor: Gertrud not only knew the moment that Adolph had been elected but also correctly predicted that he would be killed by his successor (I.2.3).

In Gertrud's mental universe, all aspects of the divinity are imperial. It is one of many epithets that she applies to the Trinity (e.g., IV.35.1, IV.41.1); God the Father, the heavenly emperor who sits "on his lofty imperial throne of divine majesty" (IV.3.1), commands the loyalty of his "princes," the angels and saints (IV.53.1). On Good Friday, Gertrud sees the saints pay feudal homage while kneeling (IV.26.4); on another occasion she sees Christ, "the Son of the supreme king, honorably invested with imperial regalia," appearing before the throne of God the Father to rejoice in the conversion of a sinner (IV.58.6). The offerings that Gertrud through her spiritual exertions makes to the Lord at Epiphany he places in his imperial diadem, explicitly comparing them to the fabled opal known as "The Orphan," which was once, literally, the jewel in the crown of the Holy Roman Emperor (IV.6.5, and note). The Lord's generosity is "divine and imperial" (IV.16.5), and on one occasion, daringly, Gertrud is called his empress (IV.2.15), just as on another she appears as queen with the heavenly princes Peter and Paul kneeling before her and her lord (IV.44.3). More often, however, it is the Virgin who is "the glorious empress of heaven" (IV.51.2, etc.), served by angels (IV.48.15), and Christ, enthroned, is her "imperial son" (IV.9.6).

Such vivid poetic imagery invokes the highest manifestation of human and secular authority known to the visionary to convey a sense

of overwhelming awe in the presence of the power and beauty of the divine. But it does more than that: it also articulates a particular view of the dynamics of the relationship between human beings and God that is essentially feudal. Inevitably, it is not always easy for the modern reader to empathize with this. A particularly elaborate comparison, which tropes God as emperor and the religious as his vassal, will illustrate how Gertrud's text uses this imperial imagery for a specific didactic purpose. At issue is a dilemma relating to fasting, obedience, and discretion too complex to summarize here, but this is part of Christ's answer:

> If anyone, prompted by zeal for the religious life, voluntarily offers to keep the fast prescribed by the Rule for love of me, . . . I welcome this as the emperor welcomes his faithful vassal's offer to furnish the table most generously with food every single day at his own expense. . . . But when it happens that from fervor of spirit he is so distracted in the strict observance of the fast that he unknowingly disobeys his superior's instructions [to moderate the fast] and then comes to his senses and repents, determining to be careful in future, I courteously forgive that person, just as the emperor on the field of battle forgives his faithful vassal who is strenuously fighting against enemies on his behalf, if he has been momentarily and unexpectedly wounded, but without any serious harm. (IV.52.4)

Here and elsewhere Gertrud presents the relationship between human beings and God as essentially reciprocal and contingent. God is like the ideal emperor, who rewards his vassals for their loyalty and service with gifts. Just as a vassal might offer to provide his lord with food, or fight on his behalf in battle, the devout perform certain services or recite certain prayers, and in return, as a good feudal lord, God promises heavenly rewards—or an increase of the reward already due.

However, this is not a simple transaction. In another conversation concerning the reward to be gained by those nuns who chanted (or failed to chant) a certain response, it becomes more nuanced:

> <Gertrud> said, "If they can win such great good with so small an act of devotion, what harm befalls the negligent, since they can so easily make up for what they have neglected?" The Lord replied, "When the emperor generously lavishes rewards and gifts on one of his nobles, and in addition adorns him with precious garments, when he returns from the emperor everyone knows that he has been generously invested and truly honored. However, if he neglects to care for the good things bestowed on him, he exposes himself to poverty and runs the risk of loss. Nonetheless the kindly king does not take away the clothing that his royal generosity had conferred on him. Similarly, when I dispense such magnificent blessings for so small an act of devotion, people are afterwards bound to exert themselves the more assiduously in such things, and if they neglect to do so, they certainly lose the fruit of those good things." (IV.54.5)

The point here is that the vassal's reward entails the obligation to continue to deserve it; the reward itself cannot be lost, but through negligence its benefit can. For Gertrud conceives of heavenly reward not as a quantum but as an accumulation—of glory, grace, or blessedness (see, for instance, IV.2.2; 13.4; 21.3; 28.2; 32.1; 42.1; and cf. III.62.1). These endowments can be deflected toward or shared with others (IV.8.2; 54.2) and can continue to grow (see above, IV.13.2), for even the reward of the greatest saints can be increased by the actions of those on earth (IV.44.3). Moreover, as at an idealized imperial court, there are degrees or gradations of merit in heaven. Christ himself makes this point to Gertrud, explaining that, "truly none of the saints is so completely equivalent in glory to another that there is no difference in some reward" (IV.50.7). Some of these ideas and assumptions will not sit altogether easily with the modern reader unless we make the effort to reimagine Gertrud's historical context.

Metaphors: Bees and Honey

Gertrud's texts are full of references to sweetness: hardly a page goes by without "sweet," "sweetly," or "sweetness" appearing, or

compounds such as "sweet-sounding" and "sweetflowing" (there are more than two hundred examples in this translation and lamentably no synonyms for such words to provide variety). Some readers may for that reason find her too saccharine. However, once again we need to re-create her mental and physical world. Unlike our own environment, where sugar and all kinds of sweet food and drink are only a few steps away, in the Middle Ages sweetness was a much rarer, and presumably more intense and significant, experience. Cane sugar was not widely available in medieval Europe. It was an expensive luxury, imported from the Near East; having originated in China, as early as the tenth century it had, says Clive Ponting, "spread to the Levant and the eastern islands of the Mediterranean, especially Cyprus."[19] Otherwise, the only common source of sweetness was honey. References to honey, and the honeycomb (*favus*), are common enough in Holy Scripture, and Gertrud's texts use them as symbols—indeed, almost as clichés—for sweetness. She is also particularly fond of the adjective *mellifluus*, "honey-sweet" or more literally "flowing with honey," which in book 4 appears eight times, most often applied to Christ's words, voice, or mouth (chapter headings to IV.3 and 38; IV.4.4; IV.38.2; IV.49.1).

But Gertrud also uses images of bees and honey in some surprising and unusual ways. Medieval monasteries were enthusiastic beekeepers, not primarily for the honey (though no doubt it was a welcome by-product), but mainly to provide beeswax to make candles, especially for the monastic church, and also for seals (IV.36.2), which were made from beeswax combined with resin and were required to authenticate letters and legal documents. So it is not surprising that Gertrud seems to have known a fair bit about bees and honey, though some of her ideas may seem strange to us. In a startling passage, Saint John the Evangelist is shown to her in the form of a little bee (*apicula*):

> She immediately saw the vast sea of the Godhead within Jesus' breast, and in it Saint John, in the form of a delicate little bee,

19. Clive Ponting, *World History: A New Perspective* (London: Pimlico, 2000), 353.

> swimming like a little fish in indescribable delight and freedom. . . . Having drunk most thirstily and become intoxicated by most delightful torrents, he seemed to put forth from his heart something like a proboscis, and from that to sprinkle throughout the compass of the whole world drops of divine delight, which were the most salutary admonitions of his teaching of salvation, and especially of the gospel, *In the beginning was the Word*. (IV.4.5)

The Evangelist appears "within Jesus' breast" because he was "the disciple that Jesus loved" and at the Last Supper reclined on his breast, which, as the site of the divine heart, is the dwelling-place of the Godhead; that Godhead was often symbolized as a "vast sea." But why is the saint described as "a delicate little bee"? In the Middle Ages the bee had a reputation not only for industriousness but also for chastity, and Saint John had traditionally abandoned his bride (some sources identified her with Mary Magdalene) at the wedding feast at Cana to follow Christ. Of further interest is Gertrud's reference to the bee's *vena*, translated as "proboscis"; the bee's proboscis is the functional equivalent of a tongue, through which it feeds on nectar and with which it then discharges the nectar it has gathered back into the bee hive. Perhaps only those who dealt with bees, or had talked to those who had, would know this detail about the bee's physiology.

The references to honey in a chapter significantly titled "The Honey-Sweet Feast of Pentecost" are particularly disconcerting. As Gertrud meditates on her unworthiness, it seems to her that the Lord was making something like "a hollow place in her heart":

> Then from the honey-sweet heart of the Son of God was dropping down a most pure source of sweetness in the form of a honeycomb, which little by little was dripping into the hollow of her heart, until it filled it up to the top. . . . Then with his divine hand the Son of God blessed the fullness of the hollow as if it were a baptismal font, so that whenever her soul entered into it, it was purified from every spot and rendered acceptable. (IV.38.1)

This vision may seem less alien if we think of "the hollow of her heart," filled with honey from the divine heart, as a reminiscence of the so-called log hives. These were naturally occurring cavities in trees that were cut out and then used as beehives; in Central and Eastern Europe they were often decorated and became a form of folk art. Here, one has mutated into a baptismal font, which is also of course hollow and often circular like a tree trunk, into which Gertrud's soul is plunged. We may also find it hard to visualize Gertrud's soul emerging from this bath of honey "purified from every spot," "without any spot of sin, as if *whiter than snow*" (IV.38.3), but possibly this is an oblique allusion to the antiseptic, healing, and preservative powers of honey. These were so well known in the Middle Ages that it would not be necessary to mention them specifically.

Nectar, which, unlike honey and the honeycomb, is not mentioned in Holy Scripture, also appears in book 4. In a vision of Saint Agnes, Gertrud sees the Lord

> attracting every devout delight that has moved or still moves someone's heart and has aroused it to devout love of God, thanks to that same virgin's words, flowing with honey, which are still often recited in church. All these, wonderfully ennobled in his heart like sweetest nectar, he was distilling into the heart of blessed Agnes. (IV.8.2)

Elsewhere there are references to a welcome drink of "sweetest nectar" (IV.23.5), "a drink more welcome . . . than sweetness of nectar and balm" (IV.52.5), and to the reception of the sacrament "with balsam's nectar of the most delicious divine nature" (IV.13.5). On the feast of Pentecost, nectar is given a specific interpretation when Gertrud sees the gifts of the Spirit appearing in the form of trees: "From the trees of wisdom and understanding, too, streams of nectar flowed, symbolizing that through the spirit of wisdom and understanding the sweetness of divine fruition powerfully influences and delightfully satisfies the soul" (IV.38.4).

Themes of Book 4

There are, then, some new themes and imagery in book 4, but the reader is bound to wonder what this, the longest of the five books of *The Herald*, has to add to what we already know about Gertrud and her thought. Book 1 focuses in its own idiosyncratic way on Gertrud's life and character, and book 2 has a special value as a firsthand account of her mystical experiences: books 3, 4, and 5 suffer in comparison. Book 4 picks up and emphasizes certain themes that have already been introduced. Generally, its approach to the spiritual life and the search for perfection is positive and optimistic: like book 3, it recognizes that a variety of approaches to God can be valid (IV.1.2; cf. III.64.3). It has little to say about such discouraging subjects as purgatory (IV.27.2 and IV.35.9 are exceptions to this rule) and even less about hell, the devil, and damnation. It frequently stresses that the virtuous intention of the will is more important than what one actually achieves; this emphasis may well be related to Gertrud's own poor health and consequent inability to "follow the convent in the strict observance of the Order" (IV.Prol.). For instance, on one occasion Christ says, "My kindness will accept it if you have taken a single step with such an intention [of carrying out a good work], or have so much as lifted a feather from the ground, or spoken one word or made one loving gesture, or if you have recited 'Rest eternal' for the dead, or anything at all for sinners or the righteous" (IV.7.2).

On another, he says, "If anyone intended with her whole will to do some good work or to concentrate on some devotion, if she fails to do it from human weakness or necessity, I shall regard her will as the deed, and at the same time I shall generously reward it" (IV.25.3). This applies not just to ordinary fallible human beings like Gertrud's sisters and readers, but even to the greatest of saints. Saint James the Apostle, Gertrud is told, died too soon to make the many converts he had hoped for, but "His good intention . . . is now after his death made good forever through the fact that signs and miracles multiply at his tomb, and so many people are both absolved from their sins and also by making devout pilgrimages are strengthened in the catholic faith" (IV.47.1).

The corollary of this emphasis on intention is awareness that apparently virtuous thoughts and deeds can lose their value if carried out with the wrong intention: in one revelation Gertrud sees some of her acts of abstinence symbolized by "little jewels set in slippery mud, loose as if about to fall off and held in position with difficulty" (IV.28.2). They are precarious because she undertook them not out of obedience but on her own initiative. More generally, slavish conformity of any sort in religion must be avoided. Gertrud is well aware of the dangers, especially in a religious community, of devotions performed as a routine duty: in another vision, the community's recitation of the penitential psalms appears "in the form of dusky pearls because the convent had recited them merely out of habit and not with special devotion." Her editor comments with her usual pedantic precision, "From this one should note that although obligations fulfilled out of habit are brought before the Lord for the increase of our merits, nonetheless whatever is carried out with conscious devotion is more excellently ennobled and graced beyond all measure" (IV.2.13).

Similarly, while the community invoke the saints as they recite the Litany on the feast of Saint Mark, Gertrud sees in a vision the names of the individual nuns appear under each saint's outstretched hands: "The names of those who were doing this with concentration and devotion seemed to be inscribed with golden letters. The names of those who were doing this only from habit appeared written in black letters. But the names of those who were doing this while bored and distracted appeared so dim that they could scarcely be made out" (IV.33.1).

This rejection of slavish conformity may be linked to Gertrud's surprisingly relaxed attitude to some matters. Although she sets an extremely high value on proper preparation for communion, she is prepared to contemplate receiving the sacrament, under some circumstances, without prior sacramental confession. This behavior would be unusual, if not slightly shocking, in the Middle Ages. Apparently a confessor was not always available in Helfta (though it

seems strange that there would have been a priest to celebrate Mass but not to hear confessions), and under such circumstances some of the nuns relied on Gertrud for guidance as to whether they should communicate. Others made their own decisions, while a third group refrained altogether out of discretion or prudence. In a vision Gertrud sees that all three groups gain some sort of divine approval for their actions though, characteristically, their rewards differ (see above):

> The following day she was praying for those women who were receiving communion on her advice, even though they had been hindered by the absence of a confessor. She saw the Lord dress them in a dazzling white garment, that is, in his innocence, adorned all over with precious jewels with the appearance and the scent of violets, which signified that humility with which they had submitted to her advice. Next they were given a pink garment covered with gold flowers, which symbolized the Lord's passion in perfect love, through which anyone obtains worthy reward. . . . Those who received communion even though they had not been confessed, not on her advice, but trusting on their own account in the goodness of God, the grace of God working within them, were given only the pink garment covered with gold flowers: these too sat down with the Lord at his table. But those women who with humility and lamentation did not receive communion seemed to be standing before the table and taking great pleasure in its abundant delicacies. (IV.7.4)

Gertrud as Teacher, Preacher, Writer, and Mystic

Book 4 fills out some aspects of Gertrud's self-presentation already sketched in the earlier books. Highly literate, she is first and foremost a preacher and teacher. This role is an essential part of her sense of identity but is vulnerable to her physical weakness. In one dialogue she complains to Christ that she has lost the ability to speak effectively: "The Lord replied, 'If you had the gift of speaking, you would perhaps think that it was your eloquence that drew people to me. Therefore I have partially deprived you of it, so that

you may realize that you are able to do this not by yourself but by my special grace' " (IV.30.1). But she also enjoys a special privilege in these roles: elsewhere, Christ declares, "none of those who listen to your words with humility and are directed according to them by pious intention could ever perish. By a safe way and direct route, free from every error, they shall reach me, *the way, the truth, and the life*" (IV.14.1).

The idea that Gertrud is a reliable teacher who provides others with unassailable access to the divine is perhaps linked to the priestly role with which Christ repeatedly endows her. She herself finds this role disconcerting:

> The Lord breathed on her and gave her, too, the Holy Spirit, saying, "*Receive the Holy Spirit: whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them*." At this she said, "Lord, how can this be, since this power to bind and loose is given to priests alone?" The Lord replied, "Anyone whose case you have judged to be innocent, discerning through my Spirit, will certainly be reckoned guiltless in my sight, and anyone whose case you have determined to be guilty shall appear answerable in my sight: for I shall speak through your mouth." (IV.32.1: cf. I.14.4; I.16.1; and, most appositely, II.20.2)

As an extension of this preaching and teaching role, Gertrud is also a writer, as writing captures speech. She suffers from a writer's anxiety about her preoccupation with her work to the exclusion of other duties: on the feast of Saint John the Evangelist, "she was pondering with thanksgiving what she had written about those things that she had received from the Lord. . . . At the sequence . . . she was putting these aside to concentrate on those words that were being chanted to the honor of blessed John. That blessed evangelist appeared to her and . . . forbade her to put aside the aforesaid thoughts" (IV.34.3).

Gertrud betrays her love of books and reading when she perceives that "the Lord accepts in place of work eagerness for or intention of reading or even holding a book in one's hand" (IV.44.1—a comforting

thought!). There are many casual references throughout the text that indicate a familiarity, unusual in a medieval woman, with the physical process of writing with pen and ink, with various written documents and their function. Sometimes these references are fantastic rather than realistic: on the feast of the Circumcision she "found on the upper lip of her soul, delightfully written in bright gold letters with frequent strokes shining like sparkling stars, *Jesus*, and on the lower lip, written in the same way in bright gold letters, *The Just One*" (IV.5.2). And on the feast of the Nativity of the Virgin, "during the antiphon 'For the birth is at hand,' at the phrase 'May she intercede for our sins,' the Lord's mother seemed reverently to present to her son a charter, brought her by the ministry of angels, in which the same words, that is, 'May she intercede,' were written with letters of gold" (IV.51.4).

A passage that includes layout and methods of punctuation as an essential part of its elaborate exegesis relates to Saint John the Evangelist, so often represented in medieval art as in the act of writing his gospel or the Apocalypse. Gertrud sees him writing a document that, the Lord explains, will record the service of the community: "As blessed John sat writing, he sometimes seemed to dip his pen in the inkhorn that he was holding in his hand and write black characters with it. But sometimes he seemed to dip his pen into the loving wound of Jesus' side, which was laid open before him, and from this he formed rose-red letters, punctuating the same red writing partly with black and partly with gold" (IV.16.1–2).

Gertrud also notices the layout of this document, specifically the presence of marginal notes (IV.16.5) and of a blank space after every second paragraph. This, she learns, represents the community's failure to perform specific works in memory of the passion (IV.16.3). The details of spelling, too, figure in Gertrud's mental world in the Lord's ingenious explanation of the word "Alleluia." He links its five vowels to the five senses, noting that "in that word 'Alleluia' are found all the vowels except for 'o,' which symbolizes sorrow, and in its place the first vowel, that is 'a,' is doubled" (IV.27.4).

Writing is of course more than a physical activity and also includes composition. Gertrud comments on Saint Bernard's teaching, which progresses seamlessly from thought to oral teaching to a written account: "Considering it diligently in his devout heart, through the medium of his holy throat he uttered it with his consecrated mouth and faithfully wrote it down with his holy hands for all those desiring to progress in these things towards salvation" (IV.49.2).

On the feast of Saint Gregory the Great, Christ assures Gertrud of the pleasure both he and the saint gain from the continuing use of his writings: "My entire divine nature takes wonderful pleasure in every one of his writings. . . . He too shares my enjoyment as often as anything from his writings is recited in church, or anyone is salutarily pricked with compunction, or prompted to devotion, or fired with love from reading or hearing them" (IV.10.3).

Gertrud perceives that written versions of teaching can increase the author's merit after death. She interprets one of Christ's sayings as meaning that "whenever anyone writes or teaches others, intending to advance God's praise and the progress of souls, then all the progress that anyone ever makes as a result of that writing or teaching, even over a thousand years, adds in total to the salvation of the person who by his own intention first offered this to the Lord" (IV.13.2).

But whether teaching, preaching, or writing, what kind of a mystic is Gertrud? Perhaps it is easier to say what she is not. Many well-known medieval women visionaries, such as Birgitta of Sweden and Julian of Norwich, experienced detailed narrative visions of scriptural events, particularly of the nativity and the passion. These often included vivid details that were not found in the gospel accounts. Gertrud's senior contemporary, Mechtild, also had her fair share of such visions. Gertrud, in contrast, is not really a visionary of this type. Her revelations are firmly attached to their liturgical, rather than historical, occasions: exceptions are striking and deserve some comment. On Quinquagesima Sunday she has a vision of the passion, specifically of Christ's scourging. She sees Christ tied to the pillar, "standing between two guards, of whom the one seemed to strike

him with thorns and the other with a knotted scourge" (IV.15.4). This sort of affective vision, whose primary purpose is to stir up compassion for Christ and remorse for one's sins, is common in other writers but in Gertrud exists mainly to be expounded, in a sober and rational fashion. She perceives that "the two who were striking him symbolized laypeople who, sinning openly, strike the Lord as if with thorns, and some religious who, the more greatly they offend against their religious state, the more they strike the Lord as if with knotted scourges. But both strike him in the face: for as far as they can they do not fear to dishonor the sight of him who reigns in heaven" (IV.15.5).

Although this vision has a certain grim Northern European realism, it makes no claim to supplement or supplant the gospel accounts. But this is exactly what Gertrud does when her amanuensis records an insight granted her during Holy Week concerning the penitent thief: "Although he was a criminal and dedicated to banditry, nonetheless wherever he recognized a manifest injustice he always resisted and rebuked it. He did this on the cross, too, by arguing with his companion about his abuse of the Lord's majesty and by confessing that he was guilty and justly condemned. That is why he won mercy from God" (IV.24.3).

It is typical of Gertrud to offer very precise interpretations of her visions. Some of the more elaborate allegorical exegeses, one suspects from hints given in the text, originated in a moment of inspiration or insight but were then worked through discursively in detail by Gertrud's own powers of reason. Because she is a self-aware and reflective mystic, she recognizes this tendency and seems to have found it worrying. For instance, in IV.2.14 she asks about the profit that accrues from angels' joining with human beings in psalm singing. Receiving no answer, she works out her own answer, "through divine inspiration," but then worries that she "had acquired this perception not from the spirit of God but from her own understanding." Again, on Sexagesima Sunday she asks the Lord how during the coming week she can (metaphorically) construct Noah's ark and receives a detailed and ingenious response. She then admits to the Lord that she acquired

this "by the exertion of [her] own thoughts," so will not claim any particular authority for it as that might be a precedent for others to do the same. But he reassures her that if people's wills are perfectly united with God's, "they can confidently assert whatever good they have grasped with inner relish by exercising their own ideas, as long as it has the support of Holy Scripture and is compatible with their neighbors' profit" (IV.14.5). Indeed, on Holy Cross Day the Lord implies that inspiration and reason are complementary when he urges her to meditate on the seven words from the cross rather than hanker after physical relics of the passion, gently chiding her, "If you had not been instructed through my inspiration, you could consult your reason" (IV.52.3).

This tension between discursive human reason and divine inspiration is mirrored in Gertrud's amanuensis's explanation of Gertrud's "two ways" of enjoying God. Sometimes Gertrud is so absorbed in ecstasy that she cannot pass on any spiritual insights to others, or only partially and with great difficulty. For instance, of the insights that she received on Trinity Sunday, her amanuensis records that "she could not unfold to human understanding anything about those things that she had so clearly perceived in the mirror of the divine brightness, except for those few that she could expound only with difficulty by fits and starts, using some comparison" (IV.55.1).

But at other times Gertrud's mode of enjoying God is more controlled and more rational. Through scriptural meditation in particular Gertrud could enjoy "spiritual understanding with wonderful taste and delight, as if she were playing with the Lord in his presence *face-to-face*, *just as a friend* sometimes plays chess in private with his dearest friend. And from these experiences she was able to serve the needs of others" (IV.2.3).

Her enjoyment of God through ecstasy could have disconcertingly physical results, from which she prayed to be relieved. One Sexagesima Sunday

> she was so ravished from her bodily senses and inwardly united to God that she failed to sit down and stand up with the

> community. Reprimanded by someone, she realized that she was acting differently from the others, and she besought the Lord that she might control her body with his help, lest she should stand out through any eccentricity. . . . She received this gift: that she was never so united to God inwardly that she could not pursue what had to be done outwardly with proper discretion. (IV.14.5)

All the same, her amanuensis later reports that she spent most of Good Friday and Holy Saturday "as if bereft of her senses" (IV.26.2).

Gertrud and the Divine Heart

Medieval ideas about the human heart and its function were quite different from those today. People today regard the heart physically as a pump, which circulates the blood, while metaphorically it is the seat of the emotions, in particular of love. For the Middle Ages, following Aristotle, the heart rather than the brain was the center of the body and its main organ. As scholars have pointed out, it "governed the principal functions of the body"[20] and was "the center of sensation and movement."[21] It was the seat of understanding, the source of blood,[22] and above all "the dwelling place of the soul."[23]

By the time readers reach book 4, they are familiar with Gertrud's ideas about the heart of Jesus. The heart is regularly described as "divine"; it is "the Holy of Holies" (IV.4.4), "where the fullness of the divine dwells bodily" (II.7.1), so it both embodies and exemplifies the mystery of the incarnation. The dwelling place of Christ's divine nature, it is also the guarantor of Christ's human nature, of his complete identification with humanity: Christ declares to Gertrud, "I accepted that human heart for human salvation" (IV.25.7). Christ's

20. Heather Webb, *The Medieval Heart* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2010), 14.

21. Charles G. Gross, "Aristotle and the Brain," *The Neuroscientist* 1 (1995): 245, 246.

22. Webb, *Medieval Heart*, 37.

23. Webb, *Medieval Heart*, 21.

heart, like any other, is a physical organ moved by its own heartbeats. Gertrud's colloquy with Saint John the Evangelist stresses this point:

> Affected by indescribable pleasure from the movements of the heartbeats by which the divine heart was constantly moved, that woman said to Saint John, "Did not you too, beloved of God, sense the pleasure of these most delightful heartbeats when you reclined at the Last Supper on that most wonderful breast?" He replied, "Yes, and . . . from those very heartbeats my spirit is also powerfully set on fire." (IV.4.4)

It is the source, above all, of the divine *pietas* or "loving-kindness," particularly the parental (fatherly and motherly) love of God toward men and women. From it, "the bubbling force of divine love" pours out "draughts of sweetness and consolation" (IV.4.4) without ceasing.

Gertrud has many striking and beautiful images to describe the heart. It is a treasure chest from which Christ dispenses riches to those for whom Gertrud prays (IV.25.7), "the divine treasure-house" (IV.58.3; cf. II.8.4; III.25.2; V.10), or like a religious house, "a place astonishing beyond description," in which the feast of the Dedication is about to be celebrated (IV.58.2). The Holy Spirit, in the form of a dove and swooping down like an eagle, searches out "the sweetest heart of Jesus, and entering it, he showed himself most content with the home provided by that most holy breast" (IV.38.6). It appears "in the form of a golden censer, from which as many fragrant wisps of smoke were wafting up to God the Father as the kinds of people for whom the Lord suffered death" (IV.26.7). From it grows and burgeons "the tree of charity, lovely in stature and extremely beautiful in branches and fruits, having leaves shining like stars" (IV.35.4). Even more surprisingly, it is an object that can be opened out to wrap around Gertrud's head, and on which she can place her hands and her feet (IV.38.7).

But what book 4 does have to contribute is a consciousness that this devotion to the divine heart is something new. Possibly Gertrud had been attacked for introducing a novel devotion: certainly there are vague references in the text to her "detractors" (IV.58.1) and

critics. The issue is foregrounded in a dialogue with Saint John the Evangelist, whom she sees as enjoying privileged access to Christ through his heart. For Gertrud, the mysteries of the heart have always been there and were especially well known to Saint John, but there is nothing in the Fourth Gospel about them. Why should this be, she demands? "Affected with indescribable pleasure by the motion of the heartbeats that constantly stimulated the divine heart, she said to Saint John, 'Did not you too, beloved of God, sense the pleasure of these most delightful heartbeats when you *leaned on that most wonderful breast* at the Last Supper? . . . Why have you kept such profound silence about this?' " (IV.4.4). The answer is simple enough: the time was not ripe. The saint replies:

> Truly it was my part to write for the infant church a single word about the uncreated Word of God the Father, a word on which the understanding of the whole human race could feed until the end of the world, although no one can ever completely grasp it. But the preaching of the delight of these heartbeats was kept for the present time, so that the world, now growing old and sluggish in the love of God, may grow warm again from hearing of such things.

A Final Note on the Text

Our knowledge of Gertrud and the *Legatus* is far from complete and continues to evolve. This translation uses the standard SCh text (see p. xi, n. 2). The editors used five manuscripts of the Latin text, but only two contain all five books. The earliest of these, Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek clm. 15332, was written in 1412; the other, Vienna, ÖND MS 4224, was written in 1487 and 1490. In addition, Darmstadt, Staatsbibliothek Hs 84, written in 1472, which contains some of book 1 and all of books 2 and 3, is probably the other half of a recently discovered manuscript, Harvard, Houghton Library, MS Riant 90, which contains books 4 and 5. The fifteenth-century manuscript Trier, Stadtbibliothek Hs 77/1061, and Darmstadt, Hessisches

Landes- und Hochschulbibliothek Hs 84, written in 1472, contain only books 1 to 3, while Mainz, Universitätsbibliothek Hs 13, lacks book 5. What is notable about all these manuscripts is that none is earlier than the fifteenth century, even though Gertrud died in the early fourteenth century.

That makes the recent discovery of Leipzig, Universitätsbibliothek MS 827, which can be dated to the early fourteenth century, particularly important. However, the version of the *Legatus* preserved in that manuscript is very different from the current "standard edition." It is about a third the length of the standard version and contains a considerable amount of previously unknown material. It opens with book 2, though not in the standard order, and surprisingly omits the last four chapters. It is arguable that the Leipzig manuscript is a copy of the original version of Gertrud's text, a first draft possibly, but a more definitive view must await further study and an edition of the newly discovered version. Both will greatly enhance our understanding of Gertrud and Helfta.

THE HERALD OF GOD'S LOVING-KINDNESS

PROLOGUE

Since one should be particularly attentive to strenuous devotion on feast days, for the benefit of anyone who therefore wishes to find material, in this one place has been arranged whatever seemed fitting from those spiritual consolations with which the Lord visited <Gertrud>[1] on all the feasts during the year when, her strength failing, she could not follow the convent in the strict observance of the Order.

1. The Latin text never refers to Gertrud by name (apart from using the genitive form, *Drudi*s, in the title of *Legatus* IV.17), but uses *ista*, *illa*, or *ea*. The proper name has been provided when necessary to avoid ambiguity.

CHAPTER ONE

PREPARATION FOR THE BIRTH OF CHRIST

1. On the night before the vigil of the most holy Nativity of the Lord she had spent a long unsleeping hour before Matins and had taken much pleasure in turning over the words of that response, "From that hidden habitation <of his, the Son of God shall go forth>."[1] She realized that the Lord Jesus was reclining very peacefully *in the bosom of* God the *Father** with most sweet tranquility. Like a cloud of incense, the desires of all those intent on devoutly celebrating the coming feast were directed toward him. The Lord Jesus, beautiful and delicate, was sending out wonderful splendor from his divine heart toward all those clouds of incense; this splendor was preparing a path for them to come to him. By this she perceived that when each woman approached the Lord, those who had humbly entrusted themselves to the prayers of others were hastening toward the Lord unerringly on the direct path, in the splendor of his divine heart, as if carried by the

*John 1:18

1. *De illa occulta habitatione sua egressus est filius dei; descendit visitare et consolari omnes qui eum de toto corde desiderabant*; "From that hidden habitation of his, the Son of God shall go forth; he has come down to visit and console all those who long for him with all their heart"; response for the Office of 23 December.

hands of those leading them and supported on each side. But those who were attempting to celebrate the feast devoutly by relying on their own efforts and prayers were hindered by losing their way, sometimes stepping off the path, but sometimes they returned to the path and approached God in the light divinely provided for them.

2. And when she was longing to know how the divine loving-kindness condescended to bend down to each one, she realized that they had all suddenly been carried to the very couch of the Father's sweetness, to the Son of God, and each was delighting in him in proportion to her desire and capacity. Nor could one be hindered by another, but each was enjoying God fully, in proportion to her desire, as if offering herself to God himself alone. For some were embracing him as a tender little child made flesh for us; others were treating him as a most faithful friend to whom they could reveal with the greatest confidence all the secrets of their hearts. Still others were caressing him as a radiant spouse *chosen out of a thousand thousand*,* according to every delight of their heart. And in this way each was allowed happily to take pleasure in him in proportion to her love.

*see Song 5:10

3. Then approaching him *she fell down at the feet of her Lord** in her usual way, saying, "And now, my most loving Lord, what preparation can be mine, or what can I show by way of service to your most blessed mother on that feast of her most holy childbirth? For I even fail to perform her Hours, to which I am bound by the vows of religion, not only from physical weakness but, alas, by my own neglect." Then the kindly Lord, taking pity on her poverty, seemed tenderly to offer every word that she had spoken during Advent to the praise of God and the profit of souls,* either in teaching or in helping someone, to his sweetest mother, sitting by him in wonderful glory. He did this in recompense

*see Mark 7:25

*see RB 58

for all the ways in which <Gertrud> had neglected to reverence her with due honors and services, with all the fruit that could result from the same words from one person to another, until the end of the world. The mother of the Lord received this offering with the greatest pleasure and seemed made wonderfully beautiful by it. Approaching her in a spirit of devotion, <Gertrud> was begging her that she would deign to pray for her to her only son. Immediately, serene in her motherly gentleness, she bent down to her and then, caressing her only child with lovely embraces and kisses, prayed for her with these words, saying, "May your love, my dearly beloved son, united with mine, be favorably disposed toward the most powerful prayers of this your lover." After this, caressing her beloved, <Gertrud> addressed him with these words: "O sweetness of my soul, Jesus most loving and most desiring, of all precious things the most precious!"

4. And when she had repeated these and other similar expressions of love, she asked the Lord, "What fruit can these words bear, what feeble little efforts can my worthlessness bring about?" The Lord replied, "What difference does it make what sort of chest encases spices, or what boxes an unguent, since when they are stirred they breathe out the same scent? In the same way, when anyone says to me, 'Sweetest, most loving,' and so on, even though the one who speaks thinks himself unworthy through his own worthlessness, nonetheless the intrinsic sweetness of my divinity is stirred in its very depths and breathes out to me fragrance of wonderful delight. It also wafts the scent of eternal salvation toward the very person who prompted my sweetness with such words."

CHAPTER TWO

THE VIGIL OF THE MOST SWEET BIRTH OF JESUS

1. On the following day, while she was keeping watch for a short time before Matins, in bitterness of heart she was examining before the Lord a failing of impatience into which she had fallen as a result of the negligence of those who were serving her. When she heard the first bell for Matins strike, she was praising the Lord with joyful spirit in the sound of that first bell, which proclaimed to her that the feast of the surpassingly sweet birth of her Lord was at hand. Suddenly the heavenly Father spoke kindly to her and said, "Look! I am sending into your soul that love that I sent on ahead, before the face of my Only Begotten, to purify the world from its sins" (as is clear from the Sodomites who, Scripture asserts, were all slain on the very night of the most holy birth).[1] "By this you too will be completely purified from every stain of sin and blemish of negligence and made ready for the coming feast." Having received this gift, she was still turning over her failing in her heart with lamentation, thinking herself quite unworthy of all God's gifts as she had slipped into such great impatience

1. As asserted in the *Legenda Aurea*; see *Jacobus de Voragine: The Golden Legend*, trans. William Grainger Ryan, 2 vols. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 1:41.

from such minor negligence on the part of those serving her. On this the divine mercy instructed her with this insight: that all the thoughts in which a person examines her failing with sorrow, after suitable penance (of which Scripture says: "In what hour so ever the sinner turns and groans, I shall not remember his sins any more"),[2] are simply preparation to receive God's grace.

2. Then at the second stroke of the bell, while she was similarly intent on praising the Lord through it, God the Father said, "Look! Once again I send into your heart the same love that I sent on ahead, before the sight of my Son, for the correction of all failings of human weakness. In the same way it will correct all your failings in which there is no spiritual advantage. For instance, there are certain failings by which a person is humbled and pricked by conscience when she recognizes them in herself; in these there is an advantage for human salvation. And such failings I sometimes permit in even my dearest friends, so that through them they may be exercised in the virtues. There are also failings that a person minimizes when she recognizes them and, what is worse, sometimes even defends as righteousness and does not consent to be corrected for them. And as a result of such failings a person risks very great danger and eternal damnation. From these your soul is now completely purified."

3. Then at the third stroke of the bell, while she was similarly eager to join in praising the Lord through that sound, the heavenly Father granted her all the vir-

2. See Pseudo-Ezek 33:12, as adapted by Pseudo-Augustine, PL 38:140. This is "the second most common quote in the scholastic debates on penitence" (James W. Marchand, "An Unidentified Latin Quote in *Piers Plowman*," *Modern Philology* 88 [1991]: 398–400, here 398).

tues that before the birth of his Only Begotten he had sent on ahead into the hearts of the fathers of old, that is, of the patriarchs, the prophets and others faithful to him, to yearn for his desirable coming. These virtues are humility, desire, knowledge, love, hope, and others like them: worthily prepared by these, she too would celebrate the present feast. Thus with these and other virtues fittingly arraying her, the Lord adorned her as if with wonderfully shining stars. He set her before him, saying, "Which would you rather choose, my child: that I should serve you or that you should serve me?" For she had two ways of enjoying God. In the one she was so completely ravished into God through ecstasy that she was able to recount very little that was accurate concerning that enjoyment for her neighbors' profit.

But there was another way, in which she sharpened her senses through scriptural exercises, *the Lord working withal*,* and enjoyed spiritual understanding with wonderful taste and delight, as if she were playing with the Lord in his presence *face to face*, *just as a friend** sometimes plays chess in private with his dearest friend. And from these experiences she was able to serve the needs of others. And this was what the Lord was asking her: whether she would choose that he should serve her in the first way, or whether she would be willing to serve him in the second. But she, *seeking not her own** but what was the Lord Jesus', chose rather to toil in serving to his praise than to satisfy her own pleasure at leisure and *tasting how sweet is the Lord*;* the Lord seemed wonderfully to welcome this.

*Mark 16:20

*see Exod 33:11

*1 Cor 13:5

*Ps 33:9

4. And when Matins was being intoned, during *O Lord, come to my assistance*,* she was begging for divine help; during *O Lord, you will open my lips*,* a verse that is sung three times, she was worshiping the vast omnipotence of God the Father and the unsearchable

*Ps 69:2

*Ps 50:17

wisdom of God the Son and the sweetest kindliness of the Holy Spirit as a humble petitioner, by greeting *with all her heart, with all her soul and all her strength** one God in Trinity and Trinity in unity. Then during five verses of the psalm, *Why, O Lord, are they multiplied?** she was approaching the rosy wounds of Jesus and sweetly kissing them. During the sixth verse of the same psalm, she was *falling at the Lord's feet, worshiping and giving devout thanks** for the complete remission of all her sins. During the seventh verse she was giving thanks to the Lord's hands for all the blessings ever bestowed on her by God's freely given loving-kindness. During the eighth verse she was hailing most devoutly the loving wound of the Lord's most holy side. During "Glory to the Father," she was reverently bowing* before him with all creation in praise of the radiant and ever-tranquil Trinity. And during "As it was in the beginning," she was approaching the heart of Jesus, greeting it with intimate love and extolling it because in it lie hidden most completely the incomprehensibilities of the divine nature.

*Mark 12:33

*Ps 3

*see Luke 17:16

*see RB 9

5. After this, at the first verse of the psalm *Come, let us praise the Lord*,* once again she flung herself down before the wound of the Lord's left foot and begged for complete forgiveness[3] for all the sins that she had committed in wicked thoughts and words. During the second verse, before the wound of the right foot, she obtained compensation for all that she lacked in perfection of holy thoughts and words. Before the wound of the Lord's blessed left hand, too, during the third verse, she received remission for all the sins that she had

*Ps 94

3. *plenam indulgentiam*, possibly with its technical meaning, "plenary indulgence."

committed in wicked deeds. Then before the wound of the Lord's right hand, during the fourth verse, she received compensation for all that she had omitted in good deeds. Finally, during the fifth verse, approaching the sacred wound of the side of her sweetest lover, which *abounds and more than abounds with all good things*,* and kissing it devoutly, she was purified from all stains in that rosy water that the soldier's spear drew from thence and was made whiter than snow,* made beautiful in every kind of virtue by the most precious blood, and drawn to the very fount of all good by the aromatic steam that came from it. And thus, chanting "Glory be to the Father" as before to the praise and glory of the ever-worshipful Trinity, she concluded with "As it was in the beginning" through the heart of Jesus, which is the receptacle of all divine in-flowing.

*see Rom 5:20

*see Ps 50:9

6. During the invitatory, that is, "This day you shall know <that the Lord will come, and save us: and in the morning you shall see His glory>,"[4] which is sung five times with the *Venite* and afterward repeated twice, she received from God the Father the purification of her seven affections,[5] which were ennobled in a wonderful way by their union with the most holy affections of Jesus Christ. During the remaining psalms, she stood before the Lord in raiment adorned with the blaze of

4. *Hodie scietis quia veniet dominus et mane videbitis gloriam ejus*; see Exod 16:6-7.

5. *septem affectionum*, i.e., movements of the will. According to Franciscan writers (David of Augsburg, Bonaventure, Bernardino of Siena), there are seven "affections," a theory that derives ultimately from Aristotle. See Krijn Pansters, *Franciscan Virtue: Spiritual Growth and the Virtues in Franciscan Literature and Instruction of the Thirteenth Century* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2012), 58–59. See also III.68.3, which enumerates them as "fear, sorrow, joy, love, hope, hate, and shame."

virtues, as if with dazzling stars. Then she stretched out her desire toward God, that in the glory of Jesus' sweetest birth all the spiritual exercises, both in body and soul, that she practiced should resound highest praise of the ever-worshipful Trinity. While the bell for Lauds was being struck, the Lord said to her, "Just as the sound of those bells announces the feast of my birth, so do I grant you that in all that you perform on that feast, in singing, reading, praying, meditating, or even in physical labor, eating, sleeping, and such like, praises shall resound to the holy Trinity in union with my desire and love, by which I have never been at odds with the will of God the Father." While seven candles were being lit, the Lord bestowed on her soul the adornment of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit, insofar as she could receive them, in the same dignity as the Lord Jesus was himself adorned.

7. After this she was praying that, by the condescension with which he was born in an inn, he would also condescend to compose her heart as pleased him. The most merciful Lord, again kindly nodding his head, disposed his omnipotence, wisdom, and kindness in her as if they were the roof and walls. Within them, as if in the inn, she rejoiced wonderfully in the depths of her being, since she saw that over the whole roof and walls were hanging in the manner of delightful little bells, all the works that by the help of the omnipotence, wisdom, and goodness of God were accomplished in anyone. It was as if they had been granted her as a means of assistance by which she might celebrate the feast most praiseworthily to God. And when she was enjoying such a choice experience, as if in heavenly delights, the Lord Jesus appeared, adding new gifts, and with most friendly condescension set her there with the attendant suite of heavenly princes. Then, when she recited "I praise, I

adore"[6] and so on 225 times on behalf of all the parts of her body,[7] it seemed as if at every single prayer she brought to the praise of God every single service of the parts of her body. Then also it seemed that the Lord was purifying all her senses, both inner and outer, in a wonderful way, through a most gentle embrace, and in purifying them was renewing them, and in renewing them was powerfully sanctifying her in union with his own most blessed senses.

8. Now when the bell was struck for chapter, she was once again praising the Lord in the sound of that bell, giving thanks that he would graciously preside in person at that chapter, just as he had graciously revealed to Lady M<echtild>, too, of happy memory.[8] Thence she recognized in spirit that the Lord was so moved by their devotion—because so many of the community longed for that chapter, because of the revelation granted Lady M<echtild> that has just been mentioned—that, as if with great joy, he seemed to await the coming of the community. He sat in the place of the lady abbess, in whose person he seemed wonderfully to rule, and to reign over her more wonderfully in the glory of his divine majesty, pavilioned about by a multitude of all the orders of blessed spirits, borne up on the imperial throne by the service of the order of thrones. And when the community had taken their seats the Lord, as if unable to contain himself any longer for joy, said with serene good humor, "Look, my dearest friends have arrived!" Then, when a young woman read, "Be pleased, lady, to

6. Probably the prayer revealed to Mechtild in honor of the five joys of Our Lord (see LSG I.19).

7. Gertrud apparently believed that she had 225 body parts (*membra*).

8. Cf. LSG I.5.

give the blessing," and the abbess replied, "In the way of his commandments,"[9] the Lord blessed the convent with his worshipful hand outstretched and said, "By the omnipotence of God my Father, I give them my assent." When the young woman went on to say, "*Jesus Christ, son of the living God, is born in Bethlehem of Judea*,"* all the choirs of holy angels, hearing the proclamation of the sweet-flowing birth of the Lord God their king, were filled with inestimable joy and in reverence for him prostrated themselves on the ground and worshiped him.

*see Matt 2:1

9. And when the congregation in its usual fashion prostrated themselves for the saying of the psalm, *Have mercy on me, God*,* each one of the angels was joyfully presenting to the Lord the hearts of those from the community entrusted to Gertrud. From each and every one, at every "Have mercy on me, God," the Lord was seen to receive an interlaced knot and to place it on his bosom. And when the hearts of those who loved the more fervently were offered to the Lord, then angels from the choir of seraphim attended the Lord, supporting his arms and preparing the hearts. When the hearts greatly enlightened in the knowledge of God were presented to him, then angels from the choir of cherubim served the Lord. When it was the hearts more practiced in virtues, those from the choir of virtues performed these duties. And in this way every single choir of angels attended the Lord when the hearts of those like them in merits of virtues were being offered. The hearts of those women who had not been stimulated to special devotion by the revelation mentioned earlier were not borne to the Lord by the service of angels, but they appeared in their own bodies prostrate on the ground.

*Ps 50

9. An ancient monastic formula requesting and granting a blessing; see Ps 118:32.

10. Then she approached the Lord in humility of spirit, offering him the first "Have mercy on me, God," which is usually recited for one's self, saying, "Look, my lovely spouse, I, willingly renouncing my entire share, offer you this psalm to eternal praise and glory, that from it you may benefit your and my special friends according to the good pleasure of your divine loving-kindness." The Lord received this gift offered him in the likeness of a most noble jewel, sparkling and translucent, and placed it in the midst of a collar that he had on his chest, a collar intricately inlaid with flashing jewels and golden flowers. He said to her, "Look! I have raised up this jewel of love that you have just offered me to this place in the midst of this collar, that all who entrust themselves to your prayers, or even hope with a single thought for your intercession, may obtain from it as great health as the Jews, bitten by serpents, gained from the sight of *the bronze serpent which I had raised up in the desert by the agency of Moses*."* *see Num 21:8-9

11. And when the psalms finished and the convent arose from their prostration, there had arrived two noble figures carrying a golden table: holding it they placed it before the Lord. Then while the Lord was loosing the knots gathered in his bosom, suddenly there became visible on that same table all the words of the psalms and prayers that the convent had said, in the likeness of sparkling jewels wonderfully distinguished by wonderful variety, and every little jewel radiated splendor of wonderful clarity with a chime of most sweet sound. For through its splendor it was caressing the Lord, dallying with loving gesture, and by the sound was moving him to return to those who had rendered those prayers a second version of all the fruit that would come to the universal church from each word. And all this she understood the Lord was doing on account of the special devotion that

the convent had because it had understood that the Lord would always preside at chapter on that day.

12. And when the list was being read in which was announced in advance the names of the women who were to chant or to read at Matins, she saw the Lord gaze upon each individual who was eagerly intent on hearing what was allotted her with such gentle calm, greeting her with a movement of his head, that human speech is not capable of telling. But some women wondered with sorrow why this or that responsory had not been similarly allotted to them: the Lord, gently touching their chins,[10] consoled them with soothing kindness. Then perceiving this in spirit, she said to the Lord, "Oh Lord, if the community knew about this gaze of such kindly gentleness directed at them, those who did not hear their names read out would indeed be sorrowful!" To this the Lord replied, "If there is any woman who would willingly read or chant if she could, and who is sorry because she cannot do so, I shall console her with the same gentleness and reward her good intention as if it had been done." And the Lord added, "If any woman, when she heard something was prescribed for her, consciously inclined her will and her head at this, because she was willing to do it to my praise, and trusted me that I would assist her to perform this duty worthily, as often as she did this my loving-kindness would draw me so powerfully to her that I could by no means refrain from planting a delightful kiss on her."

13. Then, while according to the statutes of the order, the prioress speaking first, the convent was publicly acknowledging its negligences before the lady abbess and absolved by her was bowing down, the Lord added

10. A gesture of affection; see IV.22.3, 40.21, and 51.8.

with gentle serenity, "I too absolve you, by the authority of my divine nature, from all acts of negligence that have been consciously admitted in my presence, so that, whenever out of human frailty you commit them again, you will always find me more merciful toward them and more ready to remit them." And when as usual the seven penitential psalms were recited for sins and acts of negligence, immediately all those words appeared on the table already mentioned, in the form of pearls, but dull ones, arranged around those vivid and shining jewels that have been described. And she understood through the spirit that those psalms appeared in the form of dusky pearls because the convent had recited them merely out of habit and not with special devotion. From this one should note that although obligations fulfilled out of habit are brought before the Lord for the increase of our merits, nonetheless whatever is carried out with conscious devotion is more excellently ennobled and graced beyond all measure.

14. During Vespers, while they were chanting in the hymn *Glory to you, Lord*, she saw a vast multitude of angels flying around the community and jubilantly echoing the same verse with sonorous voices.[11] Then she asked the Lord what profit human beings had from holy angels joining with them in singing psalms. When she received no reply from the Lord on this, but worked more carefully in inquiring further, she finally realized through divine inspiration that when holy angels take part in our solemnities on earth, they pray the Lord that he will condescend to make those who are eager to be like them in devotion, equal to them in true purity of heart and body.

11. See RB 19.4-5 and Ps 137:1; see also Ps-Augustine, *De mirabilibus sacrae scripturae*, PL 35:2185.

15. Then she began to be afraid (as is human) that she had acquired this perception not from the spirit of God but from her own understanding. To this she received an answer of divine consolation: "Do not be afraid: because your will is so fully united to my own divine will that you cannot will anything except what I will, and as a result you supremely desire my praise in all things, all the angelic spirits are thus subject to your pious will. Even if the angels had not prayed for you before, as you realized through the spirit they were doing, because it was your pleasure that they should do this, they would doubtless now attempt to carry this out with the greatest eagerness. Indeed, as you have been made empress by me who am emperor, all my heavenly princes follow your will implicitly—so much so that if you said they were doing something that they had not yet done, they would at once be eager to carry it out with the greatest alacrity, to validate what you had said!"

16. And so after Vespers, while as usual the relics were being carried around with the image of the blessed Virgin, <Gertrud> was sorrowfully turning over in her heart that, hindered by sickness, she had not carried out any service or prayers during Advent to offer the virginal mother on this her sweet feast day. Nonetheless, instructed by the unction of the Holy Spirit and knowing what she should do, she offered the inviolate Virgin the most sweet and noble heart of Jesus Christ to make up for all that she had neglected. The blessed Virgin, receiving it with the greatest joy and thankfulness, found in its contemplation sufficient delight of every service and honor. For that heart, most uniquely worthy and containing all good, provided her with the sum of all desirable things that could ever be provided from someone's devotion and prayer to the honor of his mother.

CHAPTER THREE

THE HONEY-SWEET NATIVITY OF THE LORD

1. Now at Matins she was attempting to concentrate on the same prayers that were described on the night before. The Lord, rewarding her faithful service in her turn, drew her completely into himself so that through a most delightful flowing of his divine nature into her soul and a flowing back of her soul to God with thanksgiving, he fed her with indescribable and inconceivable insight during every single psalm and response that was being sung. And while she was delighting wonderfully in these pleasures, she perceived the community standing reverently around *the King of kings*,* the Lord, on his lofty imperial throne of divine majesty, and celebrating Matins with great devotion to his praise and glory.

*1 Tim 6:15

2. Then, mindful of the very many women who had devoutly entrusted themselves to her prayers, she said to the Lord in humility of spirit, "Oh, how can it be right for me, unworthy as I am, to pray for those who with toil and devotion stand upright[1] singing psalms and praises, when I who am, alas, held back by weakness, could never accomplish anything like them!" The Lord replied to her, "You can indeed pray for those women,

1. Religious were to recite the Psalms standing upright; see RB 19.7 and 63.4.

for I have taken you from them and placed you in the bosom of my fatherly goodness, to request and obtain all that your soul desires." She replied, "Lord, if it is your pleasure that I should pray for them, I request that, to accomplish this, you establish a time for me at which I may accomplish this both faithfully for you and praiseworthily and usefully for them, and that nonetheless I should not be held back in any way from the enjoyment of the heavenly banquets with which you deign to feed me." The Lord responded, "Commend each of them to my divine knowledge and love, for they led me to come down from the bosom of God the Father *for the salvation of humankind*."* And when in doing this she was naming each of those entrusted to her, the kindly Lord, prompted by the sweetness of his divine love, and recalling once again with loving compassion the need of each in the light of his divine knowledge, came down to each and every one.

*see John 3:17

3. Then the Virgin Mary also appeared, illustrious in heavenly glory, honorably raised on high, sitting by her son. And when the response, "He came down from heaven, <true God and born of the Father,>"[2] was being sung, the Lord, as if reminded by these words of his most loving condescension by which he came down from the Father's bosom and entered the exile of our wretchedness through the womb of the inviolate Virgin,

2. *Descendit de caelis deus verus a patre genitus; introivit in uterum virginis nobis ut appareret visibilis, indutus carne, humana protoparentis edita, et exivit per clausam portam deus et homo lux et vita conditor mundi*; "He came down from heaven, true God and born of the Father; he entered the Virgin's womb that he might appear to us in visible form, dressed in flesh, born of a human mother, and he went out through a closed gate being God and man, the light, life, and creator of the world"; fourth response for Matins of Christmas.

and melted with love by this, with a most delightful gentleness gazed upon his mother with smiling eyes. By the influence of this loving affection, his inmost being could be profoundly moved. And so he gently planted a sweet kiss on her mouth. Through this he somehow doubled all the joys of his most holy divine nature in which she had rejoiced on earth.

4. The spotless womb of the glorious Virgin also appeared, transparent like a most pure crystal; through it all her inner organs shone forth, shot through and filled with his divine nature, just as gold wrapped in parti-colored silk is accustomed to shine through crystal.[3] She also saw the dewy-fresh little boy, the only child of the highest Father, sucking at the heart of the Virginal Mother with hungry pleasure. By this she grasped that, just as Christ's human nature was fed by the Virgin's milk, so his divine nature took pleasure in enjoying the purity of that most innocent and loving heart.

5. And while the convent was bowing deeply at the twelfth response, that is, "The Word was made flesh,"[4] in reverence for the Lord's incarnation, she realized that the Lord was saying, "As often as someone bows with devout gratitude at this verse, thanking me for having condescended to become human for love of them, I shall bow to her in return, spurred on by the stimulus of my

3. Hamburger describes this as "clearly an evocation of a reliquary"; see Jeffrey Hamburger, *St. John the Divine: The Deified Evangelist in Medieval Art and Theology* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002), 179 and fig. 93.

4. *Verbum caro factum est et habitavit in nobis et vidimus gloriam ejus, gloriam quasi unigeniti a patre, plenum gratiae et veritatis, alleluia alleluia alleluia*; "The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw his glory, the glory as it were of the Only Begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth, alleluia"; twelfth response for Matins of Christmas; see John 1:14.

own goodness. From the intimate love of my heart I shall offer God the Father every fruit of my most blessed human nature, doubled, for the increase of that person's eternal blessedness."

6. At the end of that response, at the phrase "<full of grace> and truth," the Virgin Mary, processing in the twin beauty of virginity and maternity, first came to the senior sister of the right-hand choir, and putting her right arm around her shoulder and sweetly squeezing her, she pressed her noble Child, *beautiful above the children of men*,* to her soul. And thus, proceeding through the whole choir to the community, she pressed her lovable and delicate Son in a similar way to the souls of every single woman in a gentle embrace. While they all held that most tender boy in the arms of their soul, some women seemed to support his head very carefully and comfortably as if it were placed on a soft cushion, that is, on their virtuous will. But those whose will was in some respect stubborn and imperfect allowed the boy's head to slip uncomfortably. "Therefore, dearest sisters, let us empty our hearts and consciences of all recalcitrance, and let us offer our hearts to the Lord with free and perfect will to be at the complete disposal of him who highly desires our progress in all things. Let it never happen that we should, even for the twinkling of an eye, disturb the comfort of so sweet and refined a little boy, who with the greatest courtesy has been laid to rest in the inmost recesses of our hearts."[5]

*Ps 44:3

7. During the Mass, "The Lord said <to me: You are my son, this day have I begotten you>,"[6] the merciful

5. The change to the first-person plural and the direct address to "dearest sisters" (*carissimae*) suggest that this passage is a verbatim quotation from Gertrud.

6. Introit for Midnight Mass: Ps 2:7.

Lord again filled her, through those individual words, with inconceivable insight. Thence while the words "the first-born son of Mary"[7] were being chanted in the *Gloria*, she considered that the Lord was more properly called *only* than *first-born*, because the inviolate Virgin did not give birth to any child other than that single child whom she was worthy to conceive by the Holy Spirit. Then the blessed Virgin replied to her with gentle serenity, saying: "No, no, not *only begotten*: my sweetest Jesus is most fittingly called *first-born* because I first gave him life in my virgin womb, and after him, or rather through him, I gave all of you life as his brothers and sisters, freely choosing to do so in the bowels of motherly love." At the offertory she truly perceived in spirit that all the members of the community were offering the Lord as gifts the prayers that they had rendered during Advent, and some of them were making offerings to the bosom of the boy pressed on their souls. Approaching them in their places one by one, the blessed Virgin was helping them by lovingly assisting her dearly loved Son's hand and lap to accept the gifts offered him.

8. Indeed, some people seemed to approach the altar in the middle of the choir and there to offer their prayer to the Virgin Mary, holding the child in her lap. When the tender little child was not helped to receive their prayers, he behaved as if he could not take them because of his tender age. She realized from this that the women who were placing their offerings in the lap of the Child Jesus were those who were devoutly concentrating on the Lord as born spiritually in their inmost hearts: the blessed Virgin, rejoicing in their devotion and salvation, appeared to help and work with these women. But those

7. Trope inserted into the Gloria after the words *Filius Patris*, "son of the Father."

persons who were only thinking about the Lord's being born at that time in Bethlehem, as the church presents it, seemed to approach the altar in the midst of the choir, at the same time making offerings to the Virgin Mary.

9. Then approaching the King of glory she offered to him, as she had been asked, the little prayers of certain persons rendered before the feast, and the good will of certain persons who would have willingly completed similar prayers if they had not been prevented by valid reasons. Instructed through the spirit, she realized that those prayers that had been devoutly completed were arranged on the tablet mentioned earlier[8] in the form of precious pearls, and the good will of those who would gladly have finished similar devotions if they had not been prevented by more utilitarian activities, and in lamenting their negligence were as a result made humble, seemed to be set in that most finely wrought collar with which the Lord's breast was adorned. From that those women were gaining great profit in access to the divine heart, just as one can open a chest, from which one takes a variety of pleasures, with a key.

8. See IV.2.11.

CHAPTER FOUR

SAINT JOHN
APOSTLE AND EVANGELIST[1]

1. While she was praying one day in Advent, John the Evangelist and Apostle appeared to her dressed in yellow garments woven all over with golden eagles. This symbolized that however much he was raised above himself through ecstasy in contemplation while still living in the body, nonetheless he always strove to sink down into the valley of humility through acknowledgment of his own worthlessness. And while she was examining the pattern more carefully, she saw a rosy color appear beneath those golden eagles, which radiated a little on every side around the eagles. This symbolized that Saint John was eager to begin the course of his contemplation from mindfulness of the Lord's passion, which he had indeed seen with his own eyes and had pondered in the depths of his heart through intimate compassion. And thus, progressing little by little, he flew as far as the height of divine majesty and contemplated the sun's orb itself more closely with his mind's unaverted gaze.[2]

He also had two golden lilies, one on his right shoulder and one on his left, and on the right was written in

1. On this chapter, see Hamburger, *St. John the Divine*, 179–83.

2. Traditionally, the mystic begins with the contemplation of Christ's humanity in his passion and ascends in due course to the contemplation of the divine.

*John 13:23 and 21:7

wonderful writing, "The disciple *whom Jesus loved*."* On the left it said: "This man was the Virgin's protector,"[3] because of the distinctive nature of those special privileges by which he alone, above the other apostles, deserved to be, and be called, the disciple whom Jesus loved and because, as he was about to die on the cross, the Lord judged that he should be entrusted with his lily, that is, his virginal mother.*

*see John 19:27

2. He also had on his breast a wonderful breastplate[4] because of that privilege that allowed him to recline on the Lord Jesus' breast, flowing with honey, at the Last Supper.

*John 1:1

On this was written, "In the beginning was the Word,"* to symbolize the lively strength of those most worthy words that are contained in this gospel. Then she said to the Lord, "Why, most loving Lord, have you set before me, unworthy as I am, this beloved of yours?" The Lord replied, "For this reason: that I may join him to you in special friendship, and, since you do not have an apostle, I am assigning you this one. He will be your most faithful patron before me in heaven." And she said, "Teach me, sweetest, what service I may show him." The Lord replied, "Anyone at all could say an Our Father daily for their

3. *Iste custos virginis,* from the sequence "Verbum Dei, Deo natum"; see Esth 2:15. On the sequence, "which was once attributed to Adam of St Victor but is now considered of later, Dominican origin" (Hamburger, *St. John*, 105), see Hamburger, *St. John*, 180 and 181, and for the Latin and German texts, Erika Lauren Lindgren, *Sensual Encounters: Monastic Women and Spirituality in Medieval Germany* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 163–65.

4. *rationale*: either "an episcopal humeral, a counterpart of the *pallium*, and like it worn over the *chasuble*," or "an episcopal ornament similar to a large pectoral clasp, made of precious metal, ornamented with diamonds, and worn over the *chasuble*," both worn in the Middle Ages by various German bishops (*Catholic Encyclopedia*, s.v.).

guardian apostle, bringing to mind that sweet faithfulness that his heart carefully pondered when I was teaching <the apostles> that very prayer, and pray that they might be granted the privilege of deserving to follow me faithfully to the end of their life, by steadfast perseverance."

3. Now during Matins on the feast of the same apostle,[5] while she was devoutly concentrating in her usual fashion, the beloved disciple whom Jesus loved* (and who for that reason should also deserve to be loved by all lovers) came to her, caressing her in many ways. When she had faithfully commended to him very many of the community entrusted to her, he had gently accepted the prayers of them all, saying, "I am like my Lord in this, that *I love them that love me*."* She said to him, "And what grace could a little thing like me receive on this sweet feast of yours?" He replied, "Come with me, chosen of my Lord, and let us rest together on the Lord's breast, flowing with sweetness, in which lie hidden treasuries of perfect blessedness." And catching her up he took her with him to the presence, flowing with honey, of the Lord the Savior and put her on the right, and he himself turned aside to the left, to rest. And when both were leaning on the bosom of the Lord Jesus, Saint John, touching the Lord's breast with his forefinger with most reverent gentleness, said, "Look, this is the Holy of Holies, drawing to itself all goodness of heaven and earth."

*John 13:23

*Prov 8:17

4. Then she asked Saint John why he had placed her on the right, himself choosing the left side of the Lord's breast. He answered her, "Because I have already subdued all things and, *having become one spirit with God*,* I am able to enter him subtly where the flesh cannot reach. Therefore I have chosen the inviolate <part of

*see 1 Cor 6:17

5. December 27.

Christ's body>, but since you are still living in the body, you cannot follow by entering the more inviolate parts as I do. Therefore I have placed you at the opening of the divine heart, so that from there you could draw the more freely draughts of sweetness and consolation, which the bubbling force of divine love generously pours out unceasingly to all those who desire it."

Affected with indescribable pleasure by the motion of the heartbeats that constantly stimulated the divine heart, she said to Saint John, "Did not you too, beloved of God, sense the pleasure of these most delightful heartbeats when you *leaned on that most wonderful breast* at the Last Supper?" He replied, "Yes, I did, and I declare I have truly perceived, and perceived plainly, that their delight has pierced my soul to its inmost being, just as very sweet mead can always make a fresh wheaten loaf sweeter by soaking it.[6] In addition, my spirit too has also vigorously caught fire from those <heartbeats>, just as cooking oil can catch fire the more furiously from the flames' great heat." Then she said, "Why have you kept such profound silence about this and written nothing or, at least, very little that we could profitably understand?" He replied, "Truly it was my part to write for the infant church a single word about the uncreated Word of God the Father, a word on which the understanding of the whole human race could feed until the end of the world, although no one can ever completely grasp it. But the preaching of the delight of these heartbeats was kept for the present time, so that the world, now growing old and sluggish in the love of God, may grow warm again from hearing of such things."

6. See *Legatus* V.33.1, where Christ promises to infuse Gertrud's book with the sweetness of his divinity, "just as sweetest mead strongly infuses a piece of fresh white bread."

5. And while she was admiring the comeliness of Saint John, who appeared lying on the Lord's breast, he responded to her, "Up until now I have appeared to you only in this form in which on earth I leaned on the breast of the Lord, my lover and only beloved, at the Last Supper. But now, if you wish, I shall win for you to be allowed to look upon me in the form in which I now enjoy the pleasures of the Godhead in heaven." And while she longed to win this, she immediately saw the vast sea of the Godhead within Jesus' breast and in it Saint John, in the form of a delicate little bee,[7] swimming like a little fish in indescribable delight and freedom. And she perceived that the Godhead would inhabit more often the place[8] where its force flows most powerfully into the human nature <of Christ>. Having drunk most thirstily and become intoxicated by most delightful torrents, he seemed to put forth from his heart something like a proboscis,[9] and from that to sprinkle throughout the compass of the whole world drops of divine delight, which were the most salutary admonitions of his teaching of salvation, and especially of the gospel, *In the beginning was the Word*.* *John 1:1

6. Again, at the same feast on another occasion she was taking much pleasure in hearing extolled so often

7. In the medieval bestiary bees were described as (like Saint John) peculiarly chaste: the bees' "origin is shared, as is the purity of their virgin bodies, and their birth is shared, since they do not take part in sexual intercourse, nor are they torn by the pangs of birth" (Richard Barber, *The Bestiary* [Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1999], 178).

8. That is, the divine heart.

9. *quasi venam*: I have followed the French translator, who argues that Gertrud is continuing the metaphor of the bee, but other meanings of *vena* could be appropriate here, such as "(water) pipe" and "vein."

on that day in ambrosial words the virginal integrity in blessed John. Finally, having turned to that special friend of God, she prayed that by his prayers he might deign to win for us, insofar as with the help of God's grace we were assiduous in such careful guarding of chastity, that in the life eternal, in God's glory, we might also in our own measure share the proclamations of such sweet-sounding praises with him. At this she received this reply from Saint John: "If anyone longs to share with me in blessedness the prize of victory, let him be assiduous in keeping to my way of running the race."* And he added, "Throughout my entire life, I recalled quite often with what sweet and intimate friendship Jesus, my most loving master and Lord, had looked on me. Or rather, he rewarded me with that continence that enabled me to abandon my bride and follow him away from the wedding.[10] Afterward I always manifested, in all my words and deeds, this eagerness to take greater care lest I might furnish an opportunity, either in myself or in others, to sully in any way that virtue that my master welcomes: chastity."

*see 1 Cor 9:24

7. And he added, "For the other apostles were in every respect wary of what was suspect but allowed more freely what was not suspect: as we read in Acts, 'They were *with the women and Mary, mother of Jesus*,'* and so on. But I always conducted myself warily among them so that when some bodily necessity or the salvation of a soul demanded it, I was never seen to flee the sex, but neither did I ever omit to show caution in guarding chastity. For it was my custom, whenever any

*Acts 1:14

10. Saint John traditionally "had thought of marrying but instead was called by the Lord" (*Golden Legend*, trans. Ryan, 1:50).

opportunity of human kindliness presented itself, always to call upon the aid of the divine loving-kindness. And this is what is sung of me: *In affliction have you called upon me, and I have heard you*,* for the Lord never allowed anyone to be sullied in any way at all by love for me. As a result I received this too as a reward from my most beloved master, that chastity is praised in me more than in all the other chosen. And this is not all: I have also received a place in heaven pre-eminent in special dignity, where sitting in glory and resplendent brightness I receive more directly, with sweet delight, the rays of that love that *is the unspotted mirror and brightness of eternal light*.* For as often as the church commemorates my chastity in any text, the Lord himself, my lover, greets me with a most delicately tender gesture and fills all my inner parts with an indescribably sweet joy so that a most potent drink penetrates all the innermost recesses of my soul. And this is why they sing in my praise, 'I shall place you as a seal in my sight,'[11] that is, like a vessel to catch all the emissions of my most burning—or rather, most delightful—love."

*Ps 80:8

*Wis 7:26

8. After this, led to higher knowledge, she understood that, according to what the Lord said in the gospel, "*In my father's house there are many dwelling places*,"* there were in particular three dwelling places in which in a threefold way followers of the integrity of virginal modesty enjoy blessedness. The first dwelling place belongs to those who, as was said before of the apostles, completely flee anything suspect and allow within reason what is not suspect. And if anything has assaulted their mind with temptation, they struggle courageously to defeat it. But if at times they succumb a little from

*John 14:2

11. Ninth response for Matins of the feast of Saint John; see Hag 2:24.

human weakness, they expunge this with *worthy fruits of penance*.*

*see Luke 3:8

The second dwelling place belongs to those who act quite cautiously both in what is not suspect and in what is, and who completely distance themselves from everything that could be an opportunity for temptation. They *chastise their body and bring it into subjection*,* so much so that it is impossible for it to rebel against the spirit. Among their number we see blessed John the Baptist and other spiritual men, who are all made happy in that second dwelling place, both because God's loving-kindness has freely sanctified them and because they themselves particularly cooperated with God's grace by withdrawing from evil and exerting themselves in good.

*1 Cor 9:27

The third dwelling place belongs to those who, *preceded by the Lord in the blessings of sweetness*,* abhor all evil as if innately; however, among various accidents they sometimes have dealings with the wicked and sometimes with the good, for various reasons. But nonetheless *hating evil and cleaving to the good** with immutable purpose, they are eager to keep both themselves and others unsullied. And since human affection is always present, sometimes such people profit wonderfully from it when, fearing the disturbance of that same love, they are brought low and thence alerted more carefully to their own protection. As Gregory says, "It is the mark of virtuous minds to admit a fault where there is no fault."[12] Among these, blessed John the Evangelist gained the privilege of principal victory. Thence on his feast is chanted, "He who has overcome, I shall make him," that is, "He who has overcome (that is, human affection), I shall make him a pillar in my temple, that

*Ps 20:4

*Rom 12:9

12. Gregory the Great, Epistles XI.64, PL 77:1195B.

is, like a strong vessel on which I may rest to support the overflow of divine delight. And I shall write my name above him, that is, I shall clearly imprint on him the pleasure of my divine intimacy and the name of the new city of Jerusalem,[13] that is, both inwardly and outwardly he shall receive a unique reward for each individual whose salvation he sought on earth."

9. This agrees with another occasion, on which she was considering why blessed John the Evangelist was so greatly praised for his virginal integrity, since we read that he was called from his wedding by the Lord, while blessed John the Baptist, completely untouched by any carnality, is less praised for such a virtue. The Lord, who is *the discerner of thoughts** and distributor of rewards, showed her both in a vision. The Baptist was sitting on a throne raised up and completely removed from everything, above the sea. But the Evangelist was seen standing in the middle of a path that was burning so terrifyingly that the flame completely engulfed him above, below, and around. When she saw this and was wondering at it, the Lord instructed her, saying: "Which seems to you more praiseworthy, that the Evangelist is not on fire, or that the Baptist is not burnt up?" From this she realized that the rewards for virtue that is attacked and for virtue that is preserved in peace are very different.

*Heb 4:12

10. Similarly, when at night she was constant in prayer and struggling to draw near the Lord with special devotion, she saw blessed John leaning on him, holding him tight with sweetest embraces and sweetly caressing

13. A much elaborated version of *Qui vicerit, faciam illum columnam meam in templo meo, dicit dominus; et scribam super eum nomen meum et nomen civitatis novae Jerusalem*; fifth response at Matins of the feast of Saint John; see Rev 3:12.

him in various ways. Then she humbly flung herself at the Lord's feet so that she might mourn her own shortcomings. Blessed John, gently speaking to her, said, "Do not flee my company! Here is the neck that is sufficient for the embrace of a thousand thousand lovers, and the mouth that offers sweetness to the kisses of many, and the ears that keep secrets safe from the whispers of all." Now during Matins, while "Mother, behold your son"[14] was being sung, she saw a wonderful splendor coming forth from the heart of God over blessed John, which prompted the gaze of all the saints toward him with reverent wonder. The blessed Virgin was also seen to caress him with particular alacrity, since she was called his mother. Thence also that chosen disciple, moved by a special caress of sweet love, greeted her in return. Similarly, when the individual privileges of the special friendship bestowed on him by the Lord were being recited, that is, "This is John who lay on the Lord's breast at the Last Supper. This is the disciple who was worthy to be among the secrets of heaven.[15] This is the disciple whom Jesus loved,"[16] and so on, the glory of a splendor, new but ever the same, was made manifest to all the saints. And from this all the saints were prompted to the praise of God by the indescribable joy of so beloved a disciple. And in this blessed John experienced wonderful delight.

14. *Mulier, ecce filius tuus; ad discipulum autem, ecce mater tua*; verse at Matins of the feast of Saint John; see John 19:26.

15. *Iste est Joannes qui supra pectus domini in cena recubuit, beatus apostolus cui revelata sunt secreta caelestia*; response at Matins of the feast of Saint John; see John 13:25.

16. *Iste est Joannes qui supra pectus domini in cena recubuit quem diligebat Jesus*; antiphon at Vespers of the feast of Saint John; see John 13:23 and 21:7.

11. At that sentence "<The Lord Jesus Christ> appeared to his beloved <John with his disciples>,"[17] and so on, she perceived that the form in which the Lord visited John renewed in him all the sweetness of the shared intimacy that ever he had experienced all his life. As a result blessed John, as if transformed into another man, tasted in advance to a degree the delights of eternal banquets,[18] in three things especially for which he gave thanks at his death. Of the first he said, "I have seen your face and I am awakened as if from the tomb." Of the second, "Your perfume, Lord Jesus, has awakened longing in me." Of the third, "Your voice is full of sweetness flowing like honey, <and your speech is incomparable>."[19] For from the power of his sweetest presence he had received, as it were, a certain quickening of immortality, and from the power of the divine calling, hope of sweetest consolation, and from the gentleness of his words, the enjoyment of highest delight.

12. Hearing it read that rising up at the Lord's call he began to go,[20] as if wishing to follow the Lord on foot to heaven, she perceived that blessed John had so

17. *Apparuit caro suo Ioanni Dominus Iesus Christus cum discipulis suis, et ait illi: Veni, dilecte meus, ad me, quia tempus est ut epuleris in convivio meo cum fratribus tuis*; "The Lord Jesus Christ appeared to his beloved John with his disciples and said to him: Come to me, my beloved, for it is time for you to feast at my banquet with your brethren"; antiphon at Matins of the feast of Saint John.

18. See previous note.

19. *Vidi faciem tuam, et quasi de sepultura susciturus sum. Odor tuus concupiscentias in me excitavit eternas. Vox tua plena suavitate melliflua, et allocutio tua incomparabilis*; fifth lection at Matins of the feast of Saint John, derived from Odericus Vitalis, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, I:2.11; PL 188:153.

20. *Surgens autem Johannes cepit ire*; opening of the fifth lection.

great and so firm a trust in the most loving goodness of his Lord and master that he thought <John> worthy to be taken up into heaven without the pain of death.[21] And because he had foreseen this in the daring of love, he immediately deserved to receive it. Then she began to be astonished, because books say that John passed over without the pain of death because he suffered in his mind beside the cross and also because of the incorruption of his flesh. Now she perceived that John had obtained this because of his trust. To this the Lord replied, "For the integrity of his virginity and for his compassion for my death I have rewarded my beloved with pre-excellent glory in eternal life. But as for that confident trust that led him to assume that I could refuse him nothing out of the superabundance of my sweetness, it pleased me to reward it in the present life in such a way that I took him up from the body in jubilation, unharmed by every pain of death, and I elevated his virgin body uncorrupted and already glorified, with special honor."[22]

21. According to the legend read at Matins and also disseminated in the *Legenda Aurea*, John went down alive into his grave. He was then hidden from sight for an hour by a huge light, and when it dissipated, nothing was found in the grave except manna; see *Golden Legend*, trans. Ryan, 1:55; and further, Hamburger, *St. John the Divine*, 147 and 157, fig. 140.

22. See Mechtild, LSG I.6.

CHAPTER FIVE

SALUTATION OF THE NAME OF JESU ON THE FEAST OF THE CIRCUMCISION

1. On the holy day of the Circumcision[1] she offered the Lord little greetings to the sweetest name of Jesu that certain persons had recited in praise of the Lord. These at once appeared before the Lord, hanging in the sky in the form of white roses, and from each rose hung a wonderfully tuneful little bell that was constantly moving the divine heart with indescribable delight in its own sweetness and goodness, and in the other <attributes> that she had repeated through epithets for the name, such as, "Hail, Jesu most loving, most kind, most desiring," and the like. Hence she was longing to devise epithets as sweet names for Jesu so continually that, surpassing all those pronounced earlier, they might sweetly influence the divine heart by penetrating to its innermost recesses. And when, through loving toil, her strength was failing in the search, the Lord, allured by the affection of his loving-kindness, or rather overcome, if I may say so, bent down gently toward her and in the grip of divine love planted on her mouth a kiss surpassing a draught of honey, saying, "Look, I have imprinted on your mouth my most worthy name, which you shall bear openly before all, and as often as you move your lips to utter it, you shall cause a sweet sounding song to resonate."

1. January 1.

2. At these words she found on the upper lip of her soul, delightfully written in bright gold letters with frequent strokes shining like sparkling stars, *Jesus*, and on the lower lip, written in the same way in bright gold letters, *The Just One*.* Thence from the inscription *Jesus* that she had on her upper lip and that is interpreted as "Savior,"* she perceived that she ought to proclaim to all those desiring it from her the saving mercy of the divine loving-kindness. From the inscription *The Just One*, which she bore on her lower lip, she knew that she ought to set out before those who were of a more stubborn mind and impervious to kindly advice the stern retribution of divine justice, so that in this way, by terrifying them more harshly with threats, she might correct those whom she was unable to attract to God by alluring them with sweet advice.

*Acts 22:14

*see Matt 1:21; Luke 2:11

3. After this she said to the Lord, "O sweetest lover, like a loving spouse deign to wish our community, always beloved to you, a happy New Year." The Lord replied, "*Be renewed in the spirit of your mind*."* She said, "Most merciful father, let not your loving-kindness forget on this day of your most holy circumcision to circumcise all our shortcomings." The Lord replied, "Be circumcised through reflection on your Rule." Then she said, "O most loving Lord, why do you respond so severely to my requests, as if you did not condescend to offer us any help from your grace but wanted us to toil at them by our own efforts, although, as you yourself witness, *without you we can do nothing*?"* Pleased at these words and as if mollified by honeyed sweetness, the Lord placed her soul in his bosom and, gently stroking her, said, "I certainly wish to work with you all so openly that if today, that is, New Year's Day, anyone has been eager to scrutinize through true compunction of heart, to my praise and because of my love, what she

*Eph 4:23

*John 15:5

has done wrong in any feature of the Rule whatsoever, and if she has resolved to be assiduous in avoiding it in the future, I will be at her side, like a most kindly master who is teaching his beloved and tender pupil the alphabet on his lap, pointing with his finger, erasing what is wrong, and rewriting what has been left out; I shall mercifully amend all her shortcomings and make up for any negligences in fatherly fashion. And when that person has passed over some things without thinking, like a small child who wanders off, by most sedulous scrutiny I shall in the meantime make up for her what she has neglected." And the Lord added, "If anyone is eager to withdraw her will courageously from all that she knows to be opposed to me, and to direct it toward all that is pleasing to me, I will give her the light of knowledge from the splendor of my divine heart, and for this purpose I will guide all the parts of her fingers so that she may construct a more praiseworthy and most fitting present for me, and one most salutary and useful for herself, which every year in the manner of a loving bride she may worthily offer me, her lovely spouse, as a bridal gift."

4. Then she was praying for someone who greatly desired her to beg the Lord that, just as people in the world customarily give each other gifts at New Year, he would grant her fidelity to God with her whole heart, for better and for worse. The Lord kindly replied, "Because she has the will and the desire to ask such things from me, I accept this gift from her, which I find wonderfully welcome. But as it is also fitting for me to give her a gift in return, as she asks, let this be between her and me, both for her profit and for my pleasure, so that my share may shine to my glory and she may adorn her own share with my help minute by minute. For just as a mother while teaching her daughter constructs a piece of

embroidery with her daughter's hand but with her own skill, so with my eternal wisdom I shall construct this gift by means of that person."

5. Also she perceived that the pearls and jewels with which the present should be adorned were holy pursuits and desires and various thoughts tending toward God, such as of the fear and love of God, of hope and joy and the like: God did not neglect a single one from which he might work the soul's eternal salvation. Then she prayed for more people, and especially for one who had recently been troubled by a disturbance that <Gertrud> had unwittingly caused. The Lord replied, "*I have enlarged** her bosom through the disturbance that happened earlier, and I have made her hand more fit to receive my gifts more fully and appropriately." Then she said, "Alas, Lord, that I, wretched as I am, was your scourge in the purification of that friend of yours." And the Lord said, "Why say 'alas'? For everyone who purifies my chosen in this way is a gentle scourge in my hand, because she did not mean to bring them trouble but wholeheartedly sympathized with them, and her own merit is increased by the purification of the other."

*Ps 4:2

CHAPTER SIX

A THREEFOLD OFFERING ON THE EPIPHANY OF THE LORD

1. On the solemn feast of the Epiphany, following the example of the Three Kings' gifts, she was offering God, in place of myrrh, the body of Christ with all his sufferings and with all her own suffering, with which she desired to have made amends for the sins of everyone, from the time of Adam up to the present day, to the glory of God. Next, in place of incense, she was offering the most devout soul of Christ with all her spiritual exercises, in compensation for the failings of the whole world. Finally, in place of gold, she was offering the supremely excellent divine nature of Christ with delightful enjoyment, in compensation for the shortcomings of all creatures. The Lord Jesus appeared, presenting that offering to the ever-worshipful Trinity, in the form of a most beautiful box. And when he seemed to traverse heaven, she saw all the host of heaven, out of reverence for him, bend their heads to the ground while bending the knee, just as the more devout are accustomed to do when the Lord's Body is brought to those present.

2. Then she recalled that out of humility certain women had entrusted her with offering the Lord on their behalf the little prayers that she had rendered before that feast, in memory of the royal offerings just mentioned. When she had done this with what devotion she could,

the Lord Jesus again appeared to her, bearing that offering, too, across heaven to present it to God the Father. The heavenly host, coming to meet him, praised and extolled that offering as a truly fitting gift. From this she perceived that whenever someone offers the Lord her prayers or other efforts, the whole court of heaven extols it as a present welcome to God. But when someone is not content with what she has and adds the more perfect efforts of the Son of God, the saints honor it, as said before, as if it is not fitting for anyone to aspire to its dignity except the most worthy Trinity alone above all.

3. Another time on the same feast while "And *going in, they worshiped him*"* was being read in the gospel, stimulated by the example of blessed Mary she rose up in fervor of spirit and again flung herself with most humble devotion before the Lord Jesus' most holy feet, worshiping on behalf of *all those in heaven, on earth, and in hell*.* And since she found nothing that she could worthily offer him, she began to run to and fro throughout the whole world with anxious desire, seeking in every creature to see if she could track down something worthy to be offered to her one and only beloved. And when she was running, athirst in fervent desire, burning and panting, she found some things that were deservedly despised by every creature as not leading to the praise and glory of the Savior. Eagerly appropriating them, she carefully brought them back to him, whom alone all creation is bound to serve.

*see Matt 2:11

*see Phil 2:10

4. From these she first drew to her heart through fervent desire every pain, fear, sorrow, and anxiety that any creature had ever endured, not for praise of the Creator, but from the defect of its own weakness. These too she offered the Lord, in place of excellent myrrh. Second, she drew to herself all the false holiness and ostentatious devotion of hypocrites, Pharisees, heretics,

and the like. These too she offered the Lord in place of the most fragrant sacrifice of incense. Third, she strove to draw to her heart all human affection and the false and impure love of all created beings. This too she offered the Lord in place of precious gold. Through the ardor of loving desire, by which she strove to bring the whole world back to the service of her lover, she seemed to present at once to the Lord in her heart all these, like gold tested in the furnace, purged of all dross and wonderfully ennobled.

5. The Lord, taking inconceivable delight in their manifold charms as if in the choicest of presents, gathered them together in the form of precious jewels. Setting them in his royal crown he said, "Look, I have accepted the jewels you just offered me with courteous gratitude for the great value of their choice rarity. I shall wear them continually in the crown on my head as a reminder of singular love, to glory before the whole host of heaven in those things that you, my spouse, have conferred, just as the earthly emperor bears in his crown a precious stone that is called 'The Orphan'[1] in the vernacular because of its unique nature, for its equal is not found in the whole wide world."

6. Then, mindful of a person who had asked her again and again to offer the Lord something that day on her behalf, she asked the Lord what he would like her to offer on the other's behalf. The Lord said to her, "Offer me her feet, hands, and heart. Feet signify desires; because this person fervently desires to make amends to

1. In the Latin text the German word *wesant* appears here (in some manuscripts *ein Besant)*. The imperial German crown once contained a single center stone, an opal of great size and beauty known as *der Waise*. It is mentioned in a poem by Walther von der Vogelweide and was lost sometime in the fourteenth century.

me for my passion, let her be eager to bear patiently, in union with my passion, to the praise and glory of my name and to the profit of the church my bride, all emotional and physical burdens that obstruct her path. And I shall accept this offered me in place of choicest myrrh. Since hands signify work, let her also be eager to complete all works, both spiritual and physical, in union with the most perfect works of my most holy humanity, by which the whole world will be wonderfully ennobled and sanctified. This I shall welcome in place of the burning of sweet-smelling incense. Similarly, since the heart signifies the will, in all that she must do let her always humbly ask someone else what is my will. And whatsoever that person decides, let her trustingly accept it as my supreme good pleasure, which I shall deem in place of the offering of purest gold. And let her know that just as precious electrum is indissolubly welded from gold and silver, fused by fire, so her will shall be united to my divine will in return for that humility and trust with which she seeks to know my will from another."

7. Then, when she wanted to offer the Lord the prayers of certain persons, devoutly entrusted to her, she saw that on his left side the Lord had under his arm a hidden pouch, which his right hand could easily reach, in which he seemed to have the prayers rendered him by those persons. Out of this whenever he liked he frequently gave favors to his special friends. And when she herself offered on their behalf, as asked, the same prayers appeared set out before the Lord in the form of various presents and adornments, from which the Lord generously arrayed all those who came to him ill prepared and adorned. From the fact that the Lord showed that he cherished these prayers in two different ways, she understood that those persons had obtained what

they expected through that faith with which they had so generously entrusted themselves to her to be offered to the Lord: just as long as the kindly Lord condescended to accept them with pleasure, it made no difference whether she offered those prayers on her own behalf or on theirs.

CHAPTER SEVEN

VENERATION OF THE LORD'S FACE ON *OMNIS TERRA* SUNDAY

1. On *Omnis terra*[1] Sunday, like the faithful of Rome who desire to see the image of the Lord's most loving face,[2] she was preparing herself in the evening through spiritual confession,[3] and thence from the recollection of her sins saw herself as ugly. She fell at the Lord's feet, intending to lay down that ugliness, asking the Lord for remission of all her sins. Raising his venerable hand, he gave her a blessing in these words: "I grant you forgiveness and remission of all your sins from the bowels of my generous loving-kindness." And the Lord added, "For true amendment of all your transgressions, accept from me the imposition of this act of satisfaction: that for every single day the whole of this year you shall carry out some good work in union with

1. The second Sunday after Epiphany, so called from the opening words of the introit, *Omnis terrra adoret te deus et psallat tibi; psalmum dicat nomini tuo, altissime*, "Let all the earth adore you, God, and let it sing a psalm to your name, most High"; see Ps 65:4.

2. A reference to the cult of the image of the Holy Face preserved at St. Peter's in Rome and exposed to the faithful on the second Sunday after Epiphany.

3. That is, as opposed to sacramental (there seems to have been a problem with the availability of a confessor, see para. 4 below).

that loving-kindness by which I have remitted you all your sins."

2. Although she gratefully accepted this, nonetheless hesitating a little from human weakness she said, "And what am I to do, Lord, if I somehow neglect to do this, when the opportunity offers itself?" The Lord replied, "Why would you want to neglect something that you can carry out so easily? For my kindness will accept it if you have taken a single step with such an intention, or have so much as lifted a feather from the ground, or spoken one word or made one loving gesture, or if you have recited 'Rest eternal' for the dead, or anything at all for sinners or the righteous." Greatly consoled by this, she began to pray for her special friends, that they too might receive such consolation from the divine mercy. The Lord consented to her prayer, saying: "Let all those who wish to perform the act of satisfaction imposed on you receive remission of all their sins from this blessing of mine with you." And thus again stretching forth his venerable hand, he gave a blessing.

3. Then the Lord added, "Oh, with what love and most abundant blessing would I receive someone who returned to me at the end of the year bringing a harvest in which she had been assiduous during the whole year in works of charity, because those works would exceed the number of all her sins that she had committed that year!" At this when she said doubtingly, "How could that be, since the human senses *are prone to evil*,* so much so that a single person offends many times over every single hour?" The Lord replied, "And why does it seem so difficult to you? As God I take great pleasure in this: if a person would show some eagerness, I as God almighty would be willing to work with her, and in this way my divine wisdom should prevail." And when she said, "What then, Lord, do you propose to give those

*see Gen 8:21

who accomplish this with your assistance?" the Lord replied, "I can only tell you in these words: *That eye has not seen nor ear heard, neither has it entered into the heart of man <what things God has prepared for those that love him>*."* O how fortunate would someone be who completed before death just one year or even one month in such pursuit of loving-kindness! For certainly that person, too, could hope to receive the like from the hand of the most kindly Lord.

*1 Cor 2:9; quoting Isa 64:4

4. The following day she was praying for those women who were receiving communion on her advice, even though they had been hindered by the absence of a confessor. She saw the Lord dress them in a dazzling white garment, that is, in his innocence, adorned all over with precious jewels with the appearance and the scent of violets, which signified that humility with which they had submitted to her advice. Next they were given a pink garment covered with gold flowers, which symbolized the Lord's passion in perfect love, through which anyone obtains worthy reward. And the Lord said, "Let their seats be placed near me so that all may know it is not by chance but by design that the foremost place is kept for them: it was eternally predestined that today through the virtue of humility they will receive superior gifts of grace from me but through your mediation." Those who received communion even though they had not been confessed, not on her advice but trusting on their own account in the goodness of God, the grace of God working within them, were given only the pink garment covered with gold flowers: these too sat down with the Lord at his table. But those women who with humility and lamentation did not receive communion seemed to be standing before the table and taking great pleasure in its abundant delicacies.

5. Then the most kindly Lord, taking pleasure in his own sweetness, gave a blessing with his blessed

hand, saying, "On all those who, drawn by the desire of my love, frequent the memory of the sight of my face, I impress the lively brilliance of my divine nature by virtue of my human nature. May its brightness inwardly shine through them and, in eternal glory above all others, make them illuminate all the court of heaven with the special likeness to my face."

CHAPTER EIGHT

BLESSED AGNES, VIRGIN AND MARTYR

1. On the holy night of Agnes,[1] God's beloved virgin, <Gertrud> was greatly pleased to see the Lord glorying with great love and sweetness in that praise with which the whole court of heaven was extolling the words of that virgin, which the church was repeating at that moment. Lamenting her own weakness, she said to the Lord, "Alas! Lord, what delightful sweetness could have flowed into my soul on the occasion of such sweet words, if only my weakness had not hindered it!" The Lord replied, "I am keeping it safe for you, and from there you shall draw it now or in the future, all the more sweetly because it will be the less mingled with the foolishness of your own will." From this she understood that no one's salvation is lessened by an obstacle incurred through no fault of her own. And when in the sixth lection the words, "A certain person said that blessed Agnes, a Christian from childhood, was so skilled in magic arts that she called Christ her spouse,"[2] were being read, she sorrowfully added, "Alas! Lord God, what does your supreme majesty endure from the human race?" To this the Lord replied, "I am amply

1. January 20.
2. Saint Ambrose, Ep 1; PL 17:737A.

recompensed from the voluptuous pleasure that united Agnes with me." She answered, "Ah, most kindly God, grant to all your chosen to cleave to you by the charm of such great trustworthiness, which leads you to consider of little weight all the injuries that those who speak against you inflict on you."

2. On Saint Augustine's day,[3] when the merits of very many saints were being revealed to her, she also desired something on the merits of this delightful young virgin, whom she had loved dearly from childhood. Immediately consenting to her request, the Lord raised his arm and showed her blessed Agnes, appearing most lovable and delightful, pressed to his own divine heart to manifest and confirm her extraordinary innocence, of which it is said, *Purity makes one next to God*.* For this splendid child appeared so close to God, as if practically no one in heaven could equal her innocence and delicate loveliness. And <Gertrud> perceived how, moment by moment, the Lord was attracting every devout delight that has moved or still moves someone's heart and has aroused it to devout love of God, thanks to that same virgin's words, flowing with honey, which are still often recited in church. All these, wonderfully ennobled in his heart like sweetest nectar, he was distilling into the heart of blessed Agnes, pressed to his own tender divine heart. And this wonderfully adorned that same most blessed virgin with new and varied ornaments, while she constantly deflected her glory toward the souls of those in whose devotion she was rejoicing.

*Wis 6:20

3. August 28.

CHAPTER NINE

THE PURIFICATION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

1. On the holy feast of the Purification of the blessed Virgin Mary,[1] when she heard the first bell rung at Matins, rejoicing in spirit she said to the Lord, "Look, at the sound of that bell that announces the feast of the Purification of your most chaste mother, my heart and soul greet you, my most loving Lord." The Lord most graciously replied, "All the bowels of my loving-kindness, too, *knock at the door** of my divine mercy on your behalf, obtaining for you full remission of all your sins." Then at the chiming of Matins the Lord, recompensing her soul a thousandfold for its earlier greeting, said to her, "All my divine nature greets you, the delight of my soul, sending to meet you every fruit of my most holy human nature, to prepare you on this present feast in the way most pleasing to me."

*see Rev 3:20

2. Then after a while, when she was longing to hear what was being chanted in choir but was unable to make it out because she was lying in bed, she said to the Lord in sorrow, "O my Lord, if only I were not prevented by distance, the words of the chant could rouse my heart to delight in you." To this the Lord replied, "Dearest, if you do not know what is being chanted in choir right now,

1. February 2.

turn to me and consider carefully what is happening in me, for I contain all that can ever delight you." And straightaway she realized in spirit that, as people breathe more rapidly from excessive weariness, so every single one of the Lord's members unceasingly, as if breathing, draws in all the good works that are performed by any individual in the church, and he offers them, purified and ennobled in himself, to the ever-worshipful Trinity, to its eternal praise. But as for those works that are deliberately performed to the Lord's praise, he draws them into his divine heart wonderfully and indescribably, ennobling and completing them in himself. And although any good work at all, from its in-drawing by the Lord's most holy members, works the soul's inestimable salvation that transcends all human capacity, nonetheless those works that the divine heart condescends to ennoble by its drawing power and to conduct in union with itself to the height of perfection are the more worthy, and consequently more conducive to salvation, just as a living person or animal is reckoned worthier and more agreeable than a dead body.

3. After this, while she heard the second response being sung and was lamenting that she had not heard the first, that is, "Adorn <your wedding chamber>,"[2] she said to the Lord, "Teach me, most loving Lord, how I ought to decorate my wedding chamber to please you most perfectly." The Lord replied, "Spread out your heart, just as golden tablets in the temple of idols were

2. *Adorna thalamum tuum, Sion, et suscipe regem Christum; quem virgo concepit, virgo peperit, virgo post partum quem genuit adoravit*; "Adorn your wedding chamber, Sion, and receive Christ the king; he whom a virgin conceived, a virgin bore, and, a virgin after the birth, she worshiped whom she had borne"; first response for the feast of the Purification.

once opened to prompt the people to make sacrifices on the feast days of the pagans, and show me the pictures painted on it in which my soul delights wonderfully and inexpressibly." In the Lord's words she understood that the Lord takes inestimable pleasure in the heart of anyone who spreads it out before him through the continual recollection of their own evil deeds and God's freely given blessings. Then when the antiphon, "A virgin after the birth <you remained inviolate>,"[3] was being chanted at the second nocturn, at the words, "Intercede for us," she saw the blessed Virgin wiping away with her cloak the stains on the heart and soul of the whole community and, as it were, putting them in a corner and placing herself in front of them, that divine justice might not see them. And while the antiphon *Blessed mother*[4] was being chanted, again at the word "Intercede" she saw the gracious Virgin, honorably exalted, sitting in glory with her son the King of kings, to whom she offered through a most sweet kiss the whole convent's devotion in union with her own most pure devotion, so that it might be wonderfully acceptable.

4. When she pleaded her hindrances again, the Lord said to her, "If Simeon and Anna in the temple, that is, the failings of weakness,[5] hinder you from the divine Office, come to me on Mount Calvary, where you will find a young man, a handsome lover, stretched out." When she had arrived there in spirit, and for a while

3. *Post partum virgo inviolata permansisti; dei genetrix intercede pro nobis*; antiphon at Matins for the feast of the Purification.

4. *Beata mater et innupta virgo gloriosa, regina mundi, intercede pro nobis ad dominum*; "Blessed mother and glorious unmarried virgin, queen of the world, intercede for us to the Lord"; antiphon at Matins for the feast of the Purification.

5. Possibly because both are old.

had been affected by many-faceted delight, in sweet mindfulness of the Lord's passion, it seemed to her that she had passed through a gate in the north and come to the glorious temple, where she saw the blessed old man, Simeon, standing below the altar and devoutly praying in these words: "When will he come? When shall I see him? Do you think I shall live long enough? Do you think he will find me here?"[6]

5. While he was repeating these and similar words, he was elated in spirit and, turning impetuously, he saw the blessed Virgin standing before the altar and holding in her arms the child Jesus, *lovely in form above all the*
*Ps 44:3 *children of men*.* When he saw the child, he was immediately enlightened by the Holy Spirit and recognized him as the redeemer of the world. Then, taking him in his own arms with great joy, he cried out and said,
Luke 2:27-29 "Now let your servant go in peace, Lord," and so on. And thus at those words, "For my eyes have seen your
Luke 2:30 salvation," he sweetly kissed him. And at the words,
Luke 2:31 "Which you have prepared" and so on, he lifted him up before the ark of the altar, offering him to God the Father for the true salvation of the people. Then the ark, like a clear mirror, shone forth in that place and, wrapping itself in light, the reflection of the most tender and lovable child Jesus appeared, signifying and openly declaring that he was the very one through whom every offering of the old and new covenant is made perfect. Seeing this, Simeon cried out with most burning love,
Luke 2:32 "A light to lighten the gentiles!" And thus he returned him to his mother, saying, "A sword shall pierce your
Luke 2:35 soul also."

6. Cf. *Quando veniet? quando nascetur? quando videbo? Putas durabo? putas hic me inveniet?* Augustine of Hippo, Sermo 370, De Nativitate Domini 3, PL 39:1658.

Then the virgin mother, placing him on the altar, offered on his behalf two most dazzlingly white young doves,* which the royal child pushed forward with his tender hand. These doves symbolized the simple and innocent life of the faithful, which continually murmurs in dove-like fashion with discreet consideration against all evil and gathers pure seeds, that is, strives to imitate the commendable examples of the saints. Somehow these people seem, if one may say so, to redeem[7] the Lord Jesus when they partly compensate by their own holy way of life for what the Lord, in accordance with his divine purpose, did not accomplish in his most perfect wisdom.

*see Luke 2:24

6. And when the verses of the eighth response were being chanted, that is, "Pray for the people," and so on,[8] the queen of virgins came forward, reverently kneeling, and showed herself as mediatrix between God and the community, praying most devoutly for every single member. Her imperial son, most reverently raising her up and placing her in his presence on his glorious throne, granted her complete freedom to command whatsoever she wished. Immediately she instructed the order of powers swiftly to encircle the convent and defend it valiantly from the myriad deceits of the ancient enemy. They forthwith obeyed the order of the Queen of Heaven, each one interlocking his shield with that of the other, and fortified the convent on all sides.

Then <Gertrud> said to the blessed Virgin, "Mother of mercies, surely those absent from choir right now are <also> protected by this most stringent watch?" The

7. That is, offer a sacrifice for him (as the doves were offered, Luke 2:24).

8. *Ora pro populo, dei genetrix*; "Pray for the people, Mother of God."

merciful Virgin replied, "It is not the community present in choir that is fortified by this protection: it symbolizes the community of all who wholeheartedly desire that true religion should be perpetually preserved and increased in this place and everywhere and in pursuit of this goal toil with the greatest eagerness to the best of their ability. But if there are some who care less about the preservation of the religious life and do not display this eagerness to uphold it in themselves or promote it in others, they are not supported at all by the holy angels' protection."

7. Then the Lord added, "If any desire to be protected by such defenses, let them strive to be like those shields: the lower part (that is, in themselves) should be small in humility, and the upper part (that is, in me) broad in secure confidence relying on my generous loving-kindness."

8. And when at the procession in the chapel the verse "Pray for us" and so on[9] was being chanted, she saw the glorious mother place her tender son on the altar and prostrate herself devoutly before him as if about to pray for the community. The royal child in his turn prostrated himself before her as a sign that not only did he welcome her prayers but also he willingly consented to every wish of so dear a mother.

9. *Ora pro nobis, sancta dei genetrix*; "Pray for us, holy Mother of God"; Versicle for the feast of the Purification.

CHAPTER TEN

SAINT GREGORY THE POPE

1. On the feast day of the most blessed Pope Gregory of lofty merit,[1] while she was intent on his veneration during Mass, that same pontiff, worthy in God's sight, appeared to her, surrounded by incalculable glory and heavenly honor. For through his own worthiness he seemed equal to the merits of each one of the saints. Without a doubt he was equal to the patriarchs in his fatherly foresight and diligent care with which he was concerned day and night for the welfare of the church entrusted to him. He also seemed equal to the prophets because in his most beneficial writings he predicted the varied stratagems with which the enemy would beset the human race, and added useful precautionary advice for resisting him. From this he rejoiced, rewarded for his prophecy with greater glory than any of the holy prophets. He also rivaled the merits of the holy apostles in his faithful tenacity by which, in good times and bad, he faithfully held to the Lord with complete devotion and liberally scattered the seeds of God's word in the universal church. Moreover he equaled the merits of the martyrs and confessors, in strict chastising of body, devout religion, and perfection of all holiness. And besides, he was distinguished by the worthiness

1. Gregory the Great, whose feast was formerly on March 12.

of his virginal chastity, and he rejoiced in the glory of incalculable worthiness for every thought, word, and deed over which he watched, or by his writings or advice taught others to watch, to preserve the heart's or the body's integrity.

2. Then the Lord said to her soul, "Now consider how beautifully that verse of the psalmist fits this chosen one of mine, which says that divine consolations *give joy to* the faithful *soul according to the multitude of sorrows in* a person's *heart*,* since in return for any word, deed, or even thought that grieved him <blessed Gregory> is rewarded with such incalculable delights. For when the day of his death, which we commemorate today, was at hand, he took no pleasure at all in his body, since he was in physical anguish, passing through the rushing river of death. Also all those standing around, or rather the whole church bereft of such a father and provider, were lamenting that day with gloomy sorrow. But now as it returns year by year we commemorate it as solemn and joyful, with outstanding pomp and trumpeting of praise."

*see Ps 93:19

3. Then she said to the Lord, "And what, my Lord, resulted from his having enriched and enlightened your church with such beneficial writings?" The Lord replied, "I declare that my entire divine nature takes wonderful pleasure in every one of his writings, and all the senses of my human nature feed with sweet enjoyment on the same delightful writings and sayings. He too shares my enjoyment as often as anything from his writings is recited in church, or anyone is salutarily pricked with compunction or prompted to devotion or fired with love from reading or hearing them. And from this he gains in the eyes of all the heavenly host as much worth and honor as a prince or earthly knight gains if he is honored with a garment like his lord the king's or if, sitting at the king's table, he feasts with him every day on choicest

dishes that the king himself eats." And the Lord added, "Those especially dear to you are also endowed with this privilege—I mean Augustine and Bernard and all the other doctors of the church, each according to the complexity and utility of their teaching."

4. Then, while the twelfth response was being chanted, that is, "O shepherd,"[2] blessed Gregory rose up and seemed to pray devoutly to the Lord for the church, kneeling with raised hands. The Lord, with wonderfully serene gentleness, showed him his divine heart in its entirety, so that from it he might generously take and widely distribute whatever he knew was necessary for the church. When blessed Gregory wished to scatter with both hands the grace of divine consolation that he drew from the Lord's breast across the length and breadth of the world, the Lord seemed to gird him with a splendid belt of the purest gold. This symbolized divine justice, which prevented him from descending to earth but rather suspended him in the air lest he should scatter grace on the unworthy or ungrateful. But if any did wish to obtain it, they should earn it by striving upward with their heart's desire.

2. *O pastor apostolice, Gregori beatissime, tuo posce precamine incrementum ecclesiae tuo rigatae dogmate ac defensatae opere*; "O apostolic shepherd, most blessed Gregory, pray for the increase of the church, watered by your teaching and fortified by your work."

CHAPTER ELEVEN

BLESSED BENEDICT OUR FATHER: HOW BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO PROTECT THE MONASTIC LIFE

1. On the splendid feast of Benedict,[1] our most holy father, while she was devoutly intent on God during Matins for the honor and reverence of so great a father, she saw in spirit the glorious father himself, honorably standing before the shining and ever-tranquil Trinity, lovely in form and seemly in appearance. From every part of his limbs there seemed to come forth, wonderfully burgeoning, most beautiful roses, of wonderful potency and springtime loveliness, and of a unique fragrance. Whichever of his limbs was blossoming, it was like a most lovely rose garden, as each rose produced another rose from its center, and that one yet another, and thus very many came forth from one. Of these, each surpassed the other in beauty, virtue, and springtime loveliness, and one exceeded another in fragrant and fresh beauty. And thus the most holy father, all flowering and beautiful, Benedict by name and blessed by grace,[2] was providing the ever-worshipful Trinity and all the heavenly host with cause for wonderful and incalculable delight, and was rousing them to thanksgiving for his

1. March 21 in the pre-1970 calendar.
2. Gregory, *Dialogues* 2.Prol., PL 66:126.

great blessedness. The blooms of the roses that were flowering from each one of his limbs denoted each of the practices with which he had subjugated his flesh to the spirit, and all the virtuous acts that he had performed throughout his most holy life, and also the acts of all his followers—those who, prompted by his example and teaching, renouncing the world, and following him along the path of his moderate Rule *on the king's high-way*,* have already reached the gate of the heavenly homeland and those who will reach it, from now until the end of the world. From each of these that venerable father gains a unique reward, for which the whole company of all the saints, rejoicing together in his brightness and felicity, praises the Lord without end.

*Num 21:22

2. Blessed Benedict was also carrying, as a staff, a most handsome scepter, wonderfully shining with most precious stones and wondrously decorated on both sides. As he held this in his hand, from the side facing him, the felicity of all those who were ever corrected and amended by the rigor of his Rule smiled on him from the scepter's stones: he was moved by this incalculable delight of the divine loving-kindness. From the other side, that is, the one that faced the Lord, there shone the beauty of divine justice, by which he had ever consigned to eternal punishment any of those whom he had raised up to the dignity of so great an order by generous condescension but whom he had condemned by just judgment because their faults demanded it. For the more the Lord raises someone up to a more worthy order, the more justly they are condemned if they live unworthily.

3. And when, on behalf of the community, she offered to that blessed father a complete recitation of the Psalter in his honor, he rose up with a joyful expression and offered the Lord the springtime loveliness of all his

limbs, for, as said before, he seemed to blossom for the salvation of all those who devoutly called on his paternal protection, and of all those who aspired to follow in his footsteps under the direction of his holy Rule.

4. Then while the response, "With great trust the father stood in precious death"[3] and so on, was being sung, she said to him, "What reward do you gain, holy father, because you departed this world with so glorious an end?" He replied, "I declare that because I breathed my last amid words of prayer[4] I draw breath so sweetly compared with other saints that they all take wonderful pleasure in my breathing." Then she prayed that for the sake of the glory of his precious death he would condescend to be with any member of the community at the hour of her death without fail. The venerable father replied to her, "If anyone is eager to remind me of that reward thanks to which my Lord deigned to honor and bless me with so glorious an end, I will be with that one at the hour of death without fail. Wherever I see the harmful assaults of the Enemy raging against them, I shall certainly stand before them so that, fortified by my presence, they will safely avoid the traps of the Enemy and, endlessly blessed, seek the joys of heaven."

3. *Grandi pater fiducia morte stetit pretiosa qui elevatis manibus caelos scandit in precibus*; "With great trust the father stood in precious death, who with uplifted hands scaled the heavens in his prayers"; response at Matins for the feast of Saint Benedict.

4. Gregory, *Dialogues* 2, ch. 37, PL 66:202, and cf. *Erectis in caelum manibus stetit et ultimum spiritum inter verba orationis efflavit*; "With hands raised heavenward he breathed his last amid words of prayer"; verse at Matins for the feast of Saint Benedict.

CHAPTER TWELVE

THE LORD'S ANNUNCIATION

1. On the eve of the Lord's Annunciation,[1] while the bell was being struck for chapter and she was intent on the Lord, she recognized in spirit that the Lord Jesus, together with his most virginal mother, was sitting in the chapter house in the foremost place. He awaited the arrival of the community with great tranquility, and as they arrived he welcomed them with indescribably gentle serenity. And when the Lord's annunciation was being read in the martyrology, Jesus turned to his mother and greeted her with a most gentle inclination of the head. In some way this renewed in her that incalculable pleasure and delight that she had experienced when the incomprehensible divine nature, taking flesh from her in her virginal womb, deigned to unite with our human nature.

2. Now when the convent had devoted itself to prayer by reciting the psalm *Have mercy on me, God*,* and so on, the Lord placed all the words in his virgin mother's hands in the form of colored pearls. And the royal virgin seemed to have various little scent bottles gathered in her lap that she was decorating with the pearls, that is, with the community's prayers, which her son had presented to her for that purpose. And <Gertrud> perceived that the little scent bottles signified an injury to

*Ps 50

1. March 25.

the community that had occurred the previous day from an unforeseen cause, and that they had entrusted to the Mother of Mercy.[2] And while she was puzzling over how this injury was manifested in the form of scent bottles, the Lord replied, "Just as fastidious women take greater pleasure in owning delightful little scent bottles than in other presents, because they enjoy their fragrance, so I too take considerable pleasure in the hearts of those who with humility, patience, and thanksgiving confidently entrust their injuries to my fatherly loving-kindness, which, *for those who love it, turns all things to good*,* both fortunate and unfortunate."

*cf. Rom 8:28

3. Now while she was considering why the Lord was instructing her with so corporeal a vision on that occasion (as so often), the Lord put before her the verse that is chanted on the same feast,[3] concerning the closed gate that the prophet Ezekiel once saw in spirit.* He said to her, "Just as the manner and process of my incarnation, passion, and resurrection were once prefigured by the prophets through symbols and comparisons, so now spiritual and invisible things can only be expressed to human understanding through comparisons with the familiar. And so no one should despise anything represented by images of corporeal things. Rather, one should be eager to deserve to taste sweet perceptions of spiritual pleasures through comparisons with the corporeal."

*see Ezek 44:1-2

4. Now during Matins, while they were chanting the invitatory *Hail Mary*,[4] she saw three powerful streams

2. Cf. IV.48.4, n. 5.

3. *Haec porta clausa erit; non aperietur*; "This gate shall be closed; it shall not be opened"; antiphon at Vespers for the feast of the Annunciation.

4. *Ave Maria gratia plena, Dominus tecum*; "Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with you"; invitatory at Matins of the feast of the Annunciation; Luke 1:28.

in full flood proceed from the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit and penetrate the virgin mother's heart with sweetest force and return to their source from her heart with powerful forcefulness. That in-flowing of the holy Trinity would grant the blessed Virgin this gift: that she should be mightiest after the Father, wisest after the Son, and kindliest after the Holy Spirit. <Gertrud> also knew that as often as the faithful on earth recite devoutly that angelic greeting, *Hail Mary*, those streams, overflowing with more powerful force, flow around the most blessed Virgin and from the other side flow back into her most holy heart. Thus they seek their source again with wonderful delight. From that overflow, splashes of joy, delight, and eternal salvation are sprinkled on all the saints and angels, and also on those on earth who are mindful of that same greeting, and in each they renew all the good that they have ever received through the saving incarnation of the Son of God.

5. And whenever, too, anything is recited concerning the blessed Virgin's chastity, such as "This is she who knew not the nuptial bed,"[5] "House of the chaste heart,"[6] or "The mother's womb was closed,"[7] and so on, all the saints of God rising up venerate the imperial

5. *Haec est quae nescivit torum in delicto; habebit fructum in respectione animarum sanctarum*; "This is she who has not known the nuptial bed in sin; she shall have fruit in the visitation of holy souls"; third antiphon of the first nocturn of the feast of the Annunciation; see Wis 3:13.

6. *Domus pudici pectoris / templum repente fit dei; / intacta nesciens virum / verbo concepit filium*; "The mansion of the modest breast / becomes a shrine where God shall rest; / the pure and undefiled one / conceived in her womb the Son"; fifth antiphon of Lauds, from the hymn *A solis ortu cardine* (trans. J. M. Neale).

7. *Clausa parentis viscera / caelestis intrat gratia; / venter puellae baiulat / secreta quae non noverat*; "In that chaste parent's holy womb, / celestial grace hath found its home: / and

Virgin, their lady, with special reverence, giving the Lord devout thanks for all the benefits ever lavished on the most blessed mother for the salvation of the whole world. Saint Gabriel the archangel, too, seemed to glow with a new splendor of divine light as often as the annunciation he had made was recited. And when blessed Joseph was named, to whom *the virginal mother had been betrothed*,* all the saints reverently bowed their heads in his honor and lovingly caressed him with their gaze, rejoicing in his worth.

*see Luke 1:27

6. During Mass, at which she was to take communion, she saw the Lord's glorious mother, wonderfully adorned with the beauty of all virtues. Humbly falling at her feet, her soul was praying that she would condescend to prepare her for the reception of her son's most holy Body and Blood. Then the blessed Virgin placed on her breast a most resplendent necklace with seven points, and on each a most precious jewel. These signified the outstanding virtues in which the blessed Virgin had pleased the Lord. The first point symbolized attractive purity, the second fruitful humility, the third burning desire, the fourth luminous knowledge, the fifth unquenchable love, the sixth outstanding delight, the seventh undisturbed tranquility. And when her soul, made lovely by this necklace, appeared to the divine sight, the Lord was so greatly delighted and attracted by the adornment of those virtues that, captivated as it were by love, he leaned toward her with all the strength of his divine nature; in a wonderful way he drew her completely to himself, and, delicately fostering her in his bosom, he lovingly caressed her.

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she, as earthly bride unknown, / yet calls that Offspring blest her own"; fourth antiphon of Lauds, from the same hymn.

7. Now while the antiphon *By wonderful skill*[8] was being chanted at Terce, the Holy Spirit seemed to blow from the Lord's heart like a most gentle south wind. Sweetly playing[9] with his most delightful breath on the seven jewels of that necklace that her soul was wearing before him, as if they were a musical instrument, he was chanting that antiphon in praise of the highest Trinity.

8. Next, when "Behold the handmaid of the Lord"* was being read in the gospel, <Gertrud> was greeting the mother of God with devout concentration of mind, reminding her of that unspeakable joy that she felt when at that word she had completely entrusted herself and all that would befall her to the divine will with complete confidence. The blessed Virgin, with most gentle serenity, replied, "If anyone devoutly reminds me of that joy, I shall indeed manifest to them what the hymn for this present feast requests, that is, 'Show yourself to be a mother,'[10] by showing myself truly mother of the King and of the suppliant: of the King through my power and of the suppliant through the saving profusion of my profound mercy."

*Luke 1:38

9. Then while "Today God, made man" was being chanted at Vespers during the antiphon *This is the day*,[11]

8. From a poem by the Archpoet: *Arte mira, miro consilio / quaerens ovem bonus opilio / vagantibus in hoc exilio / locutus est nobis in filio*; "By wondrous skill, by wondrous design / the good shepherd seeking his flock / while we wandered in this exile / spoke to us, in the form of his son."

9. *circumvolvens*, literally "turning"; see IV.41.2, n. 3, and cf. IV.48.8, 49.2, and 50.2: the Holy Spirit is presumably envisaged as playing an *organistrum*, of which one turned a handle to move the bow.

10. From the hymn *Ave maris stella*, "Hail, star of the sea."

11. *Haec est dies quam fecit dominus; hodie dominus afflictionem populi sui respexit et redemptionem misit; hodie mortem quam femina intulit femina fugavit; hodie deus homo factus id*

the convent was prostrate on the ground in reverence for the Lord's most courteous incarnation. As if prompted by that phrase, the Son of God, of the highest King, was calling to mind by how compelling a love he was to become human for us. Hastily he rose up from his royal throne, and standing reverently before God the Father, said, "*My brothers have come to me.*"* Oh, with how much more sweet a love do we believe that those words of his *dearly beloved son, in whom he was well pleased*,* prompted God the Father to present far richer good things to the brothers of his Only Begotten, than Pharaoh, who, rejoicing with Joseph, bestowed generous gifts on his brothers when they came to him,* as it is written in Genesis!

*Gen 46:31

*Matt 3:17

*see Gen 47:5-12

10. Longing to discover which prayer the blessed Virgin would particularly welcome on this feast, <Gertrud> was taught by her that if anyone were to recite forty-five Hail Marys devoutly every day during the octave, in memory of those days during which Jesus grew in her womb, they would render a service as acceptable to her as if they had been with her on the day on which the Lord was conceived and had offered her most assiduous care every single day until his birth. She would not have refused those people whatever they asked from her without good reason, and similarly she would be reluctant to refuse these ones.

11. <Gertrud> understood that the Hail Mary should be recited in this way: one should desire at that word

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quod fuit permansit et quod non erat assumpsit; "This is the day that the Lord has made. The Lord has seen the affliction of his people and has sent redemption. Today death, which a woman brought, a woman has put to flight. Today God, made man, remains what he was and has assumed what he was not"; antiphon for the *Magnificat* at second Vespers.

Hail that all who are heavy laden should have their load lightened; at *Mary*, which is interpreted as "bitter sea," that penitents should persevere in good deeds; at *full of grace*, that all those with no taste for grace should be given a taste for it; at *the Lord be with you*, forgiveness for all sinners; at *you are blessed among women*, that all beginners should make progress through good will; at *blessed is the fruit of your womb*, perfection for all the chosen; at *Jesus, the splendor of the paternal brightness*, true knowledge; at *and the figure of his substance*, divine love. For at each Hail Mary those words, that is, "Jesus, the splendor of the paternal brightness *and the figure of his substance*,"* ought to be added at the end.

*see Heb 1:3

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

THE INTENTIONS THAT SHOULD BE OFFERED FOR THE CHURCH ON *CIRCUMDEDERUNT* SUNDAY

1. On *Circumdederunt* Sunday[1] while she was still extremely weak, she greatly desired to receive the divine sacraments and had been eager to prepare herself as best she could. Nonetheless, for the sake of discretion, she agreed not to receive communion, to please her spiritual mother. She offered this to the Lord to his eternal praise and seemed to be standing before the Lord. The Lord, kindly bending down, received her in the bosom of his paternal kindness and, like a mother caressing her only child, said sweetly, "Because you have determined not to receive me purely because of me, I shall cherish you on my lap lest by any chance you are wearied by outer toil after me."

2. And while she was thus delighting in the Lord's bosom, she said to him, "O sweetest lover, since *the world, which is wholly seated in wickedness** at this time,[2] particularly in *surfeiting and drunkenness*,* is accustomed to resist your glory, I on the contrary desire from my whole

*1 John 5:19

*Luke 21:34

1. Septuagesima, the ninth Sunday before Easter and the third Sunday before the beginning of Lent: so called from the first words of the introit, *Circumdederunt me gemitus mortis*, "The sorrows of death surrounded me" (Ps 17:5).

2. That is, during the carnival pre-Lenten period.

heart to advance your praise in our community for its correction. So if you would deign to release me, your most unworthy handmaiden, from your service, and accept me as your messenger, I would most willingly, for love of you, declare to everyone how they might please you by frequently offering special devotion at this time, causing you to be merciful toward various vexations caused by the worldly." The Lord replied, "If anyone acts as my messenger, I reward them with this prize: they add in total to their own credit all that they have acquired for me." Through this she understood that whenever anyone writes or teaches others, intending to advance God's praise and the progress of souls, then all the progress that anyone ever makes as a result of that writing or teaching, even over a thousand years, adds in total to the salvation of the person who by his own intention first offered this to the Lord.

3. After this the Lord added, "If anyone has been attentive to necessities such as drinking or eating, sleeping, and the like, which the demands of human nature force them to accept, and takes it with this intention: let them say inwardly or outwardly, 'Lord, I accept this food (or whatever else) in that love by which you have pre-ordained from eternity that I should take this for my health, and also in that love by which you sanctified this when in your most holy human life you used something similar, to the praise of God the Father and the salvation of the human race. I pray that in union with your divine love it may add to the increase of salvation, for all those in heaven, on earth, and in purgatory.' Each time someone accepts some necessity with such an intention, that person places before me a most strong shield that defends and protects me from the various vexations with which the worldly harass me."

4. Then during Mass, while the community was receiving communion, with wonderful gentleness the Lord

laid her to the loving wound of his most holy side, saying, "Because today for the sake of discretion you omitted to receive me bodily in the sacrament of the altar, now drink spiritually from my heart the potent inflowing of my sweetest divine nature." And when, having *drunk sweetly from the torrent of the divine pleasure*,* she offered the Lord devout thanks, she saw in spirit all those who were taking communion on that day *standing in the sight of the Lord*.* Out of that preparation with which she had been eager to prepare herself for communion the Lord was giving to each and every one of them individual garments of wonderful beauty, as a special gift from the divine loving-kindness to whichever of them was appropriate; by this all were being worthily prepared to receive communion. And since the divine generosity enriched them with a similar benefit from her merits, they all drew near and collectively offered back to the Lord all those things given them to eternal praise from the merits of his chosen one, to the increase of her merits and to her eternal blessedness. Hence she perceived through this that whenever someone prepares herself for communion by special prayers, devotion, and the like but fails to receive communion by reason of discretion or humility or obedience, then the Lord satisfies her from the torrent of his divine in-flowing. And from that person's preparation he renders others well prepared to receive communion, by making them partakers in it. And he adds in total every good whatsoever that results from this to the merit of the one who, although not receiving communion, is nonetheless eager to prepare herself as best she can.

*Ps 35:9

*see Rev 7:9

5. Then she said, "O Lord, if someone who fails to receive communion acquires such great good, is it therefore better to fail to receive communion than to receive it?" The Lord replied to this, "Not at all, for anyone who

for love of my praise receives the divine sacraments immediately possesses the most health-giving food of my deified body with balsam's nectar of the most delicious divine nature, and in addition the incomparable splendor of the adornments of the divine virtues." Then she said, "What then, my Lord, happens to those who, while they fail to receive communion because of their negligences, indulge their frivolities and negligences more freely on that day?" The Lord replied, "If anyone neglects to prepare for communion and when they fail to receive communion follow their own will more freely, they make themselves very unworthy and in some way deprive themselves of the fruit of so great a sacrament, which on that day is shared throughout the whole church." And she asked, "Ah, my Lord, how is it that although some people think themselves unworthy and are also less attentive in preparation, they are nonetheless drawn by so great a desire to receive your health-giving sacrament that they never abstain on the specified days without sorrow?" The Lord replied, "Truly this happens because they are endowed with special grace and compelled by my sweet spirit, just as a king who is accustomed to kingly things naturally takes greater pleasure in delighting in the glory to which he is accustomed than in wandering the streets and squares in the manner of a menial servant."

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

BUILDING THE ARK: ON *EXURGE QUARE* SUNDAY

1. Then, on *Exurge* Sunday,[1] once again confined to bed, she was listening to *Therefore in blessing* and so on[2] being chanted at Matins. Mindful of the delight and devotion that she had quite often had in the same response,[3] she said to the Lord, "Ah, Lord, I have quite often chanted that response, and others too, with such great fervor that I thought myself caught up to stand before the throne of your glory and make resound each word and note on your heart, as on a most sweet musical instrument. But now, alas, hindered by weakness, there are many things that I fail to do." The Lord replied to her, "Because you say, my beloved, that you have quite often chanted sweetly by means of the instrument of my divine heart—and I bear witness that it is true—I myself shall now make you a fair exchange and sweetly chant

1. Sexagesima Sunday: so called from the opening words of the introit, *Exurge, quare obdormis, domine?* "Arise, why do you sleep, O Lord?" (Ps 43:23).

2. *Benedicens ergo Deus Noe ait: Nequaquam ultra maledicam terrae propter hominem; ad imaginem quippe Dei factus est homo*; "Therefore in blessing God said to Noah: I shall no further curse the earth because of the human race. For in the image of God is the human race made"; response at Matins for Sexagesima; see Gen 9:8-15.

3. See III.30.17.

to you." And he added, "Just as I once swore by myself to my servant Noah that I would *never again bring flood waters over the earth to destroy it*,* so I swear by my divine nature to you that none of those who listen to your words with humility and are directed according to them by pious intention could ever perish. By a safe way and direct route, free from every error, they shall reach me, *the way, the truth, and the life*.* And I confirm this oath of mine with the seal of my most holy human nature, which I did not then possess because I had not yet become man."

*see Gen 9:11

*John 14:6

2. She replied, "Since by your eternal wisdom you knew in advance all things with which the world would vex you, evils both past and present, why did you wish, kindest Lord, to establish this pact by your oath never again to destroy the world with flood waters?" The Lord replied, "I did this as a most useful example for human beings, that through this they may learn to agree in time of peace and confirm with a pact whatever they find useful, so that in time of adversity they are compelled, if only for the sake of their own reputation, to restrain themselves!"

3. Then she said, "O Lord God, I would greatly welcome it if you would condescend to show your servant how to serve you worthily in building the ark during this week." The Lord replied, "You will build an ark most welcome to me in your heart. But above all pay attention to this: Noah's ark is said to have had three decks,* so that on the upper one dwelt the birds, on the middle the human beings, and on the lower the animals. You, too, should divide every single day in that way: from first thing in the morning until None, offer praise and thanksgiving from the depths of your heart on behalf of the whole church for all favors ever bestowed on any human being from the beginning of the world

*see Gen 6:16

up until now, and especially for that worshipful favor by which I am sacrificed unceasingly every day from sunrise until None to God the Father on the altar for human salvation. But human beings, taking this lightly, indulge in gluttony and drunkenness, as if completely ungrateful for all my favors. While you were assiduous in offering your own thanksgiving with love for their failing on their behalf, you seem to me like the birds flocking on the upper deck of the ark.

4. "Then every day from the hour of None until Vespers, you should be devoutly assiduous in exerting yourself in good works in that most holy union by which I carried out all the works of my human nature; compensate for that universal negligence by which the whole world neglects to respond with ready compliance in good deeds owed for the great favors I have bestowed on them. And when you have done this, I see you as the human beings gathered in the middle of the ark. Then at Vespers rehearse in bitterness of heart the hardheartedness of the human race, with which human beings not only neglect to repay the duty of service* that they owe for the infinite favors received from me but rather heap up day by day various sorts of sins in addition to provoke me to wrath. Offer me, for their amendment, the pains and bitternesses of my most innocent passion and death. And in this way you pen up the animals in the lowest part of the ark." *RB 49.3

5. Then she said to the Lord, "Since I desired to obtain this instruction from you by the exertion of my own thoughts, I am not so bold as to declare confidently that you, the best of teachers, taught me these things." The Lord responded, "Why should my gift be valued the less because I brought it about by more diligent exertion in your own thoughts, which I created to serve me? For what I said when about to create man with

deliberate counsel, *Let us make man to our image and likeness*,* is more greatly commended and welcomed than what I said when creating other things: *Let there be light, let there be a firmament.*"* She said, "If I were to bring this forward as authoritative, other people too could use their own ideas and introduce various new theories and defend them as authoritative, even though they had not received them through the powerful influx of your grace." To which the Lord replied, "Add this condition: if someone finally experiences in their heart that their will is so completely united to my divine will that they have never been at odds in any respect with what pleases me in the least of things, in prosperity or adversity, and moreover in all that they do or undergo so single-mindedly desire my glory and praise alone that they have completely renounced their own interest and profit in all things, they can confidently assert whatever good they have grasped with inner relish by exercising their own ideas, as long as it has the support of Holy Scripture and is compatible with their neighbors' profit."

*Gen 1:26

*Gen 1:3, 6

6. Once again the Lord, standing before her soul with a wonderful display of gentleness, said, "Ah, lady and queen, caress me as I have so often caressed you." With these words the almighty Lord, the faithful and all-embracing lover of her soul, bent down with the utmost delicacy as if to receive a kiss from her. Then, astonished at the Lord's statement of such an unheard-of request, her soul replied with the humblest devotion, saying these words as if from the profoundest depths of her heart, "Ah, but you are God the Creator and I am your creature!" With these words at once by wonderful dispensation the divine power of God drew in her soul, and it seemed to take great delight in its lord. Then she said to the Lord, "Now, father of mercies, deign to offer your servant at least a short period of sleep, now that

I have taken spices because of the great weakness of my heart, so that I may today receive your life-giving sacraments." To which the Lord replied, "That union in which your soul is now united to me has rendered you far more alert than any physical sleep could effect."

7. Then during Mass, at which she had intended to receive communion, the Lord appeared to stand before her when she was complaining that because of her sickness she had to miss Mass. The Lord said to her, "Recite 'I confess.' " When she had done this with humble devotion, the Lord added, "May my divine nature have mercy on you, and forgive you all your sins." And stretching out his worshipful right hand, he gave her his blessing. When her soul was bowing at this, the Lord took her to his bosom and, sweetly caressing her amid tight embraces, was chanting, "Truly, man was made in the image of God."* And thus, showering kisses on her eyes and ears, her mouth and her heart, her hands and her feet, and at each one repeating the same words, sweetly chanting them, through those very words he most courteously renewed in her soul his divine *image and likeness*.*

*see Gen 1:26

*Gen 1:26

8. Then on the Thursday[4] on which the worldly customarily go wild in great *surfeiting and drunkenness*,* early in the morning after Matins a bell was struck in the kitchen for the servants to have an early breakfast before going to work. She groaned and said to the Lord, "Alas! my Lord, how early people get up to harass you with their food!" The Lord smiled and said kindly, "Do not groan, dearest, for those for whom the bell is struck are not of the number going wild in drunkenness against me: through that early breakfast

*Luke 21:34

4. Thursday after Sexagesima is still in the pre-Lenten period.

they are summoned and prompted to work. Hence I delight in their food, just as someone takes pleasure in the feeding of his beast of burden, which he feeds with fodder so that it can work for him."

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

RELIEF FROM A BURDEN ON *ESTO MIHI* SUNDAY

1. On the Saturday before *Esto Mihi* Sunday,[1] when she had withdrawn from all outward things and recollected herself within, she was taken into the bosom of the divine kindliness. There she was enjoying in-flowings of divine delights in such great tranquility of spirit that it seemed to her as if she were governing all the kingdoms of heaven and earth with the Lord. And when she had thus spent that whole feast day in spiritual joy, it so happened at Vespers that she was so greatly disturbed by something that happened that as a result she encountered a hindrance to the enjoyments that had gone before. While she had worked very hard to remove it and recognized, clear as daylight, that this burden was of no consequence, nonetheless she could not completely control her state of mind and was somehow deprived of the peace of her earlier tranquility. Finally, before Matins, when she had spent almost the whole night awake in this struggle, she was begging the Lord to condescend to remove this hindrance from her heart, so that she might deserve to rejoice in the enjoyment of the earlier delights to the praise and glory of his name. The

1. Quinquagesima, so called from the opening words of the introit, *Esto mihi in deum protectorem*, "May you be to me a God, a protector" (Ps 30:3).

Lord replied to her, "If you desire to relieve me of my burden, then you must bear the burden and stand on my left, so that I may rest on your breast. For when I lean on my left, I rest on my heart, which is most welcome to the weary, and thus I gaze directly at your heart and delight in the chiming of your sweet-sounding desires with which you continually caress me. The welcome loveliness of the various emotions that you feel for me smiles on me, and the confident trust, with which at every beat of your heart you aspire toward me, breathes on me, and the outflow of your heart's loving-kindness, with which you hope for the blessing of eternal salvation for the whole world, sweetly affects me. And the most noble treasury of your heart is open to me, from which I shall be able to distribute from your good will sufficient to all those in need. But if you stood on my right, that is, in prosperity, then I would certainly be deprived of these various pleasures. The eyes cannot smile upon nor the nostrils inhale nor the hands reach without difficulty something placed under the ear!"

2. Then she desired the Lord to give her certain things with which, during those three days when worldly people sin quite brazenly,[2] she could offer him more welcome service. The Lord replied to her, "There is no service you could offer me that would be more welcome than this: that in memory of my passion you would patiently suffer whatever burdens fall to your lot, both inner and outer, and would show yourself willing to do those things that are particularly distasteful to you. You can accomplish this most profitably in the custody of the outer senses and in their restraint. For anyone who has been assiduous in working at this in memory

2. Again, a reference to the pre-Lenten period.

of my passion may without a doubt confidently expect to receive a generous reward from my loving-kindness."

3. Then she said, "Most loving teacher, I would also now like your kindliness to instruct me with which prayers in particular I could, by placating you, gently calm you on these three days when you are provoked to wrath by the worldly." The Lord replied, "I would particularly welcome it if someone, reciting three Our Fathers or *Praise the Lord all ye peoples,** would, at the first, offer to God the Father every exertion of my most holy heart that wearies me on earth, for the salvation of humankind in praise, thanksgiving, lamentation, prayer, desire, and love, for the amendment of all earthly and carnal delights and of the perverted desires in which at this moment any human heart is entangled. At the second, let this person offer to God the Father every exertion of my most innocent mouth, in abstinence and moderation, both of eating and of speech, in continual preaching and prayer, by which I sweated for human salvation, for the amendment of all sins committed throughout the whole church in gluttony and drunkenness, and in the multiplication of harmful and futile words. At the third, let them offer to my heavenly Father every exertion of my most holy body, with all the movements of each one of my limbs and the complete course of my most perfect life, with every bitterness of my most innocent passion and death that I endured for the redemption of humankind, for the amendment of all the sins that at this time the world in its madness, by whatever movement or mood of its individual members, is committing against its own salvation."

*Ps 116

4. Then around Terce the Lord Jesus appeared to her as he was when scourged at the pillar, standing between two guards, of whom the one seemed to strike him with thorns and the other with a knotted scourge. Each was

striking him in the face; as a result his face appeared so wretched that, with melted heart, all her inner organs were moved to compassion as she gazed on him, so much so that throughout that day, as often as that picture came to her mind, she could not restrain her tears. She had never considered in her heart that one would see on earth someone of such wretched appearance as was the Lord's at that moment. For that part of his face that she saw struck with thorns appeared so lacerated that even the pupil of his inner eye was wounded, and in addition was black and blue from the swelling caused by the knotted scourge. Also from the bitterness of his suffering he seemed to turn his face away, and when he turned away from one, the other assaulted him the more keenly.

5. Then turning to her he said, "Have you not read what is written of me, *We saw him as it were a leper** and so on?" To this she replied, "Ah, Lord, how can the sharp pain of your most tender face now be relieved?" Then the Lord said, "If anyone meditating on my passion with devout heart were pierced through love and in such charity prayed for sinners, that person's heart would be a gentlest dressing for me, by which all that pain would be relieved." Also she understood that the two who were striking him symbolized laypeople who, sinning openly, strike the Lord as if with thorns, and some religious who, the more greatly they offend against their religious state, the more they strike the Lord as if with knotted scourges. But both strike him in the face: for as far as they can they do not fear to dishonor the sight of him who reigns in heaven. From this she understood that this is why the Lord's passion is recited in the gospel at this time, that that passion may be more devoutly honored by those specially chosen of Christ, both to the honor of the Lord and to the amendment of

*Isa 53:4

the church. But in particular there are two mentions of the flagellation,[3] which was shown her as so wretched on that day.

6. As to the epistle,[4] it greatly commends charity, that we should be greatly exercised in the love of both God and neighbor, by whole-heartedly feeling compassion for God, for his undeserved insults, and that we should have compassion on our neighbors because they are provoking so stern a judge against themselves. Hence for the amendment of both let us be particularly mindful of the Lord's passion, for which let us devoutly give thanks to the Lord, and let us pray that he may have mercy and spare those for whom he suffered.

7. Now at Mass, while she was invoking the Lord in the introit, the Lord laid claim to those words for himself, on the grounds that they seemed particularly appropriate because of the provocations of that present time. He said to her, "*Be my protector*,* beloved, by resolving that if you had the strength you would willingly defend me from the injuries with which I am particularly vexed at this time: for now, repulsed by others and longing to rest, I have fled to you." Then she embraced him with all her strength and was striving to draw him to her innermost being. And suddenly she was so ravished from her bodily senses and inwardly united to God that she failed to sit down and stand up with the community. Reprimanded by someone, she realized that she was acting differently from the others, and she besought the Lord that she might control her body with his help, lest she should stand out through any eccentricity. The Lord replied to her, "Send that emotion of yours that is called

*see Ps 30:3

3. Luke 18:32 and 33, in the course of the gospel reading for Quinquagesima (Luke 18:31-43).

4. 1 Cor 13:1-13.

love to me, that it may take your place in my presence, and you can concentrate on controlling your body!" She replied, "O most loving God, if one of my emotions can take my place, I certainly hope that the control of my body may be entrusted to my reason, so that I may be the more completely at your disposal!" From then onward she received this gift: that she was never so united to God inwardly that she could not pursue what had to be done outwardly with proper discretion.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

THE RECORDING OF GOOD WORKS AND HOW THEY SHOULD BE UNDERTAKEN IN UNION WITH CHRIST'S PASSION

1. The following night the Lord Jesus appeared sitting on the throne of his glory. Saint John the Evangelist appeared too, sitting at the Lord's feet and writing. Then she asked him what he was writing; the Lord said in reply, "I am having carefully recorded in this document every single service that was paid me yesterday by the community, and in addition what is to be paid me today and tomorrow. In this way, as *my father has given me all judgment*,* I shall faithfully give everyone good measure for the individual labors of their good works. In addition I shall add a *measure pressed down** from every fruit of my most saving passion and death, by which every human reward is wonderfully ennobled. With this document I shall conduct them to the Father, that he too may add, from the omnipotence of his paternal kindness, *a measure shaken together and running over** in return for those services kindly paid me at this time of persecution,[1] in which right now I am being harassed by the worldly. For since I am most faithful of all, I cannot fail to recompense my benefactors with

*John 5:22

*Luke 6:38

*Luke 6:38

1. That is, the pre-Lenten period.

good things any less than King David who, although he unfailingly responded to his servants with appropriate gifts throughout his life, when the day of his death had arrived and he had entrusted the kingdom into the hands of his son Solomon, said to him, *You should show kindness to the sons of Berzelai of Galaad, and let them eat at your table*: *for they met me when I was fleeing from the face of Absolom your brother*.* For just as someone finds more welcome a gift bestowed in bad times than in good, so I too greatly welcome that loyalty that is shown me at this time when the world harasses me the more by sinning."

*1 Kgs 2:7

2. As blessed John sat writing, he sometimes seemed to dip his pen in the inkhorn that he was holding in his hand and write black characters with it. But sometimes he seemed to dip his pen into the loving wound of Jesus' side, which was laid open before him, and from this he formed rose-red letters, punctuating the same red writing partly with black and partly with gold. She perceived that those letters that had been written in black designated the works that some religious do out of habit, such as fasting, which is begun collectively by all religious on that Tuesday,[2] and the like. But those that were inscribed in rose red designated those works done with special love in memory of the passion of Jesus Christ for the amendment of the church. And by the partly black and partly gold punctuation, she perceived that those punctuated in black were works done in memory of the Lord's passion, so that that those who do them might obtain God's grace or similar things that contribute to their own salvation. But those punctuated with gold they do purely to the praise of God, in union

2. That is, the Tuesday before Ash Wednesday.

with the passion of Christ and for the salvation of the whole world, completely renouncing all merit, reward, and grace, by which alone praise and display of love can be offered the Lord. For although the former works may win a generous reward from God, those that are done purely for love of God's praise are of much greater merit and worth, and in addition they confer on one an infinitely greater increase of eternal salvation.

3. Also she recognized that after every two paragraphs there was a blank space, and when she asked the Lord what this signified, he replied, "Since it is the custom of your community to stand before me at this time with ever-devout desires and prayers in memory of my passion, I have had carefully written down each and every thought and word with which you have all rendered me service. But the blank space designates that you are not in the habit of performing works in memory of the passion." Then she said, "How could we praiseworthily perform this for you, most loving God?" The Lord replied, "All that you do in fasting, vigils, and other disciplines prescribed by the Rule you should do in union with my passion. And whenever you deprive yourself of something, in sight, hearing, speech, and the like, you should always offer it to me in union with that love with which I controlled all my senses in my passion. For although I could have terrified with a single glance all those who acted against me, and could have refuted with just one word all those who spoke against me, *led as a sheep to the slaughter*,* humbly bowing my head *and casting my eyes to the ground*,* I *did not open my mouth** before the judge to answer with even a single word of defense against the many false accusations hurled at me."

*Isa 53:7
*RB 7.65
*Isa 53:7

4. Then she said, "Ah, most excellent teacher, teach me at least one action that we can perform specifically

in memory of your passion." The Lord replied, "I declare that by praying with outstretched hands you may bring before God the Father the idea of my passion, in union with that love with which I stretched out my hands on the cross." And she said, "If anyone wanted to do this they would have to find a private corner, because this is not our practice." The Lord replied, "That very eagerness to find a private corner would please me and enhance that practice, just as gems bejewel a necklace." And the Lord added, "Anyone who introduces this practice, praying in public with outstretched hands without fearing anyone's opposition to it, brings me as much honor as one who solemnly enthrones a king brings him."

5. Against each written record of intentions or prayers a note seemed to be made of that person who had prompted someone to perform them by admonition or example. This made abundantly clear the overflowing goodness of the divine generosity, which, also rejoicing, longs to double the reward if the insignificance of the human condition attempts to offer only once. Then she said, "O Lord, why did you not rather choose blessed Benedict to record those things, to whose order our monastery belongs, or someone other than blessed John?" The Lord replied, "Because my chosen disciple has written a great deal about the love of God and of one's neighbor, I have therefore assigned him this duty; for one should rightly have the greatest confidence in him because he records how my divine and imperial generosity should be appropriately expended, and also how it best befits the profit of you all."

6. On the Wednesday after this she came to the Lord in the name of the church, as if with her and in her place, offering herself for Lenten amendment. He caught her up amid joyful embraces, in the tenderness

of such great serenity that she learned through her own experience beyond any doubt that Christ the bridegroom was indeed espoused out of great love to his bride, that is, the church, in whose name she was herself striving to approach him at that time.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

THE LORD'S OFFERING ON BEHALF OF TRUDI'S[1] SOUL, AND THREE VICTORIES: *INVOCAVIT* SUNDAY

1. On *Invocavit* Sunday,[2] when she felt herself insufficiently prepared to receive the Body of the Lord, with devout heart she was beseeching the Lord to condescend to bestow on her his own most holy fast, which *for forty days and forty nights** had weakened him on earth for our salvation, to compensate for the fact that, held back by physical weakness, she had been compelled to cancel that Lenten fast. Hastily rising up at this request with eager face and reverently kneeling before God the Father, the Son of God said, "As the only being coeternal and consubstantial with you, I know from my unsearchable wisdom the failing of human weakness more clearly than either she or any other human being could do. In manifold ways I have compassion on her manifold weakness. Therefore, desiring to compensate for every failing of hers, I offer to you, holy Father, the most worthy abstinence of my most holy mouth truly

*Matt 4:2

1. This is the only occasion in the *Legatus* on which Gertrud is referred to by name (see *Prologue* and note). Here the Latin reads *Drudis*, genitive of the diminutive form of *Gertrudis.*

2. First Sunday in Lent, so called after the opening words of the introit, *Invocavit me et ego exaudiam eum*, "He shall cry to me, and I will hear him" (Ps 90:15).

to amend and compensate for all that she has done or left undone through profitless conversation. I also offer you, righteous Father, the abstinence of my most holy ears, for all the shortcoming of her ears. I offer you, too, the abstinence of my eyes for all the stains that she has contracted from any forbidden sight. Furthermore, <I offer> the self-restraint of my hands and feet for all the transgressions of her actions and movements. Finally I offer to your majesty, most loving Father, my deified heart for all the transgressions that she has ever committed in thought, desire, or will."

2. Then her soul, standing before God the Father, appeared dressed in white and red garments and various ornaments, just like a glorious child wonderfully embellished. The white garment symbolized innocence, which was granted her soul through Christ's abstinence; the red, the toil of abstinence; the ornaments, too, the various exertions of all the Lord's limbs, with which he purchased eternal salvation for us. Then God the Father snatched up her soul, pleasingly adorned in this way with the ornaments of his beloved Son, and set her between himself and his Only Begotten, as if at a delicious table. From one side there shone around her the splendor of God the Father's divine omnipotence, to elevate her to the excellence of such great dignity; from the other, the unsearchable light of God the Son's wisdom, which knew how to adapt these outstanding ornaments of his most perfect works and virtues to her soul. In the middle, too, of the differing splendors with which her soul seemed adorned from right and left, there appeared as it were a narrow crack separating those very splendors from each other, where the vast expanse of her own soul's worthlessness was laid open. Humbled by this but greatly pleasing God with the red blush of her welcome shame, she inflamed the more powerfully the King's mind to desire her.

3. Then the Son of God placed before her, in the shape of three dishes, his three victories that on that very day were being rehearsed in the gospel.* From these she might receive some healthy antidote against those three vices in which all the human race sin greatly: pleasure, consent, and desire. *Matt 4:1-11

First, as from that glorious victory by which he wisely overcame the devil when he suggested the pleasures of food, saying, *Command that those stones should be made bread*,* by saying *Not in bread alone does man live,** she received amendment of everything in which she had ever sinned by taking human pleasure, and strength to resist any pleasure in the future. For example, when someone is attacked by some pleasure, the more she yields to that pleasure's assault, the weaker she becomes to resist. From this anybody can offer the same victory of God's Son to God the Father, for the amendment of all in which that one has ever sinned by taking human or carnal pleasure in any created thing, praying that he or she may be given the strength to resist them all from thence forward. *Matt 4:3 *Matt 4:4

From the Lord's second victory her soul was allowed to receive forgiveness of all that she had ever contracted through consent, and the strength to resist in the future. This victory, too, anyone can offer to God the Father for the amendment of all thoughts, words, and deeds that have damaged conscience and pray for the strength to resist in the future. From the Lord's third victory her soul was allowed to receive true amendment of all that she had contracted from desire for those things that she did not possess and had longed to possess, and the strength of resisting all desire. This too anyone may be assiduous to obtain.

4. During Mass she was concentrating on the epistle* to gather the more profitable virtues from those *2 Cor 6:1-10

rehearsed in it, to imitate them and teach them to others. When she was not granted any spiritual insight on this subject she said to the Lord, "Teach me, most kindly lover, in which of these virtues in particular I could serve you to your pleasure, for alas! I cannot toil with extraordinary effort at each and every one of them on a daily basis." The Lord replied, "Consider carefully that *in the Holy Spirit** is inserted in the midst of other virtues, and because the Holy Spirit is the virtuous will, you should be eager to possess above all a virtuous will, and thus you could possess the beauty and profit of all the virtues, for the will alone produces more than anyone can ever accomplish or obtain through deeds. For if someone has the whole-hearted will to praise, thank, love, and suffer with me most gladly above every created being and, if they could, to exert themselves in every virtue in the most perfect fashion, that person will undoubtedly be copiously rewarded by my divine generosity, infinitely more than anyone could ever have accomplished by human effort." Then the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete, coming among them[3] and standing before her soul, irradiated with his divine splendor the center of her soul, where the vast expanse of her own worthlessness was laid open as written earlier, by wonderfully purifying it, and by the power of the divine brightness that soul was completely stripped of all its worthlessness and was blessedly plunged into that living fount of eternal light.

*2 Cor 6:6

3. That is, God the Father, God the Son, and Gertrud (see above, para 2).

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

WORKS OF SPIRITUAL MERCY: MONDAY

1. Now on the following Monday, while in the gospel was being read, *Come, you blessed of my Father . . . for I was hungry** and so on, she said to the Lord, "Ah, my Lord, since it is not appropriate for us to feed the hungry physically, give drink to the thirsty, and carry out the other works of mercy, because at your command we are living under the Rule* and we are not allowed to possess anything of our own,* teach me how we too can assiduously win those sweetest words of your blessing, which here in the gospel you have promised in return for works of mercy." The Lord replied, "Since I am the true salvation and life of the soul and unceasingly hunger and thirst for the salvation of all, if anyone were assiduous to recite daily some edifying words of Holy Scripture, that person would certainly alleviate my hunger with most delightful refreshment. And if they also added this intention to the reading, to obtain from it the grace of compunction and devotion, then they would also relieve my thirst with a most sweet drink. Also if anyone were eager to be at my disposal for at least an hour every day with complete concentration of mind, that person would show me most welcome hospitality. And by anyone who is eager to exert themselves each and every day in any virtue I would consider myself decently clothed. Similarly, if someone vanquished any

*Matt 25:34-35

*RB 1.2

*see RB 33.3

vice or temptation by courageous resistance, I would consider myself visited by them with diligent care when sick. And if someone has prayed devoutly for sinners and souls in purgatory, I shall accept it as courteously as if they had alleviated my despair with gentle consolations by frequently coming to see me in prison." And the Lord added, "If anyone has worked hard for my love in the ways just described day by day and especially in Lent, I shall undoubtedly reward them courteously with full divine pleasure, my royal glory, and loving faithfulness, as it befits my incomprehensible omnipotence and unsearchable wisdom and sweetest good will generously to fulfill this at any time."

CHAPTER NINETEEN

OFFERING FOR THE CHURCH ON *REMINISCERE* SUNDAY

1. After this, on *Reminiscere* Sunday,[1] as if brought to the bedchamber of her spouse, she was enjoying his more potent gifts in more potent fashion and was wonderfully delighting in the overflowing delights of the divine sweetness and loving-kindness, but she could not express anything comprehensible to human beings concerning them. She was beseeching the Lord to condescend to grant her some things that human beings could usefully practice during that week. The Lord replied to her, "Bring me two kids of the best,[2] that is, the body and soul of the entire human race." She realized from these words that the Lord was demanding amendment on behalf of the whole church from her. Then at the prompting of the Holy Spirit she recited five Our Fathers in honor of the Lord's five wounds, for the amendment of all the sins of the five senses committed by the entire human race, and three Our Fathers for the amendment of all the sins of the whole world committed or omitted by the three faculties of the soul, that is, the rational,

1. Second Sunday in Lent; so called after the opening words of the introit, *Reminiscere miseracionum tuarum, domine*, "Remember, O Lord, your bowels of compassion" (Ps 24:6).

2. Gen 27:9, from the first lection for Matins on that Sunday.

the irascible, and the concupiscible.[3] These she offered to the Lord in union with that most perfect intention with which he pronounced that prayer, sanctified in his sweetest heart, for our salvation, for the amendment of all sins committed and in recompense for any negligences that have ever occurred out of human weakness, ignorance, or malice, contrary to his unconquerable omnipotence, unsearchable wisdom, and overflow of freely given goodness.

2. When she was making these offerings, the kindly Lord blessed her with great affection, as if more pleased with them than words could say, stretching out his hand and making the sign of the cross from the top of her head to the soles of her feet.* And thus with sweet embraces he led her lovingly to God the Father to be graciously blessed. Looking on her kindly and receiving her with the greatest condescension, he blessed her in an inexpressible way, granting her a blessing for the whole human race, in that he blessed her alone, with as many additional blessings as should be given the whole wide world, if any had fitted themselves in the same way for divine grace. Consequently, during this week anyone may be eager to amend the delinquencies of the bodies of all human beings by saying five Our Fathers, and by three Our Fathers the sins of the souls of the entire holy church of God, that they too may deserve to obtain the conferment of a most saving blessing from Jesus Christ the Son of God, who condescends to show himself the head and the spouse of the church.

*see Isa 1:6

3. *vires animae*: the classification is ultimately Platonic.

CHAPTER TWENTY

PURCHASE OF CHRIST'S WAY OF LIFE: ON *OCULI MEI* SUNDAY

1. And so that her devotion might harmonize with the church's liturgy, on *Oculi mei* Sunday[1] she longed in her usual way for the Lord to teach her how she should the more specially exert herself during that week. The Lord replied to her, "Right now the story of how Joseph was sold for thirty pieces of silver[2] is being rehearsed in the church's liturgy. Be inspired by such an example and, by reciting thirty-three Our Fathers, purchase from me my most holy life, with which for thirty-three years* I wrought salvation in the midst of the earth.* And then share the fruit with the whole church for true salvation to my eternal praise." When she had done this, she saw in spirit the whole church like a bride adorned and bedecked, made wonderfully beautiful by the fruit of Christ's most perfect life.

*see Luke 3:23

*Ps 73:12

1. Third Sunday in Lent: so called from the opening words of the Office, *Oculi mei semper ad dominum*, "My eyes are toward the Lord" (Ps 24:15).

2. Fourth lection for Matins; see Gen 37:28, which, however, says that Joseph was sold for "twenty pieces of silver."

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

THE LORD'S SUPPER: ON *LAETARE* SUNDAY

1. Now on *Laetare* Sunday,[1] while she was again asking the Lord to instruct her how she might the more praiseworthily exert herself during that week, the Lord replied, "Bring before me those whom you prepared seven days before with the beauty of my life, for they are about to feast with me." She replied, "How am I to do this? Truly, unworthy as I am I would most willingly circle the whole world on bare feet from today until the Day of Judgment to bring before you, my Lord, all those with whom you deign to take pleasure. I would carry in my arms any in whom you, the sweetness of my soul, deigned to take pleasure in delight, to bring them before you, so as to satisfy a little the insatiable hunger of your divine love's sweetness. Moreover, if it were possible, I would divide my heart into so many pieces that from it I could share with everyone the virtuous intention of obeying you according to the supreme delight of your divine heart." To this the Lord replied, "Such an intention of yours, *acceptable and perfect*,* is completely sufficient." Immediately she knew that the

*see Rom 12:2

1. Fourth Sunday in Lent: so called from the opening words of the introit, *Laetare, Jerusalem, et conventum facite omnes qui diligitis eam*, "Rejoice, Jerusalem, and come together all you that love her" (see Isa 66:10).

whole church, made wonderfully beautiful, was brought before the sight of the Lord. And the Lord said, "Today you shall serve this multitude."

2. Then suddenly divinely inspired, she fell at the Lord's feet and was kissing the wound of his left foot for the amendment of all the sins ever committed by the universal church in thoughts, desires, or perverse intentions. She prayed the Lord that he would grant her, as true amendment, the most worthy amendment with which he himself purified the sins of the whole world. Well! the granting of her prayer was immediately given her soul in the form of a piece of bread, which she immediately offered the Lord with thanksgiving. The Lord, accepting it gratefully, and with upraised eyes giving devout thanks* to God the Father, *blessed* it* and then gave it back to her to distribute to the whole church. Then, kissing the wound of the Lord's right foot, as recompense for everything that the whole church has omitted in the practice of profitable thoughts, holy desires, and good intentions, she prayed the Lord that he would grant to the whole church that most worthy recompense with which he himself paid the universal debt of the human race, as compensation for its own negligence.

*see John 6:11
*see Matt 14:19

Then, kissing the wound of the Lord's left hand with most devout intention for the amendment of all sins committed by the whole world, both in word and deed, she besought the Lord to lavish on the church as true amendment that most worthy amendment with which he expiated all our delinquencies both of word and deed. Then also kissing the wound of the Lord's right hand in compensation for the negligences of the whole church that it has committed from the omission of profitable words and good deeds, she asked the Lord to deign to lavish his own most worthy perfection on the church as recompense for all its negligence.

3. Now when she had received a piece of bread at each of these wounds and, offering them to the Lord, had received blessings from him to distribute to the church, she finally approached the loving wound of the side of Jesus Christ, and kissing it from the depths of her heart she besought the Lord that, after worthy amendment of sins and sufficient recompense for negligences, he would now deign to grant the church his holy spouse the merits of his most holy life with which he shines in the sight of God the Father, to the increase of eternal blessedness, as an extra gift out of the overflow of his divine loving-kindness. When she rejoiced in having won this from the most kindly generosity of God, rejoicing she distributed this, too, as the fifth piece of bread, just as it is the custom to give nobles, already abundantly satisfied by varied dishes, as an extra gift right at the end, simply for pleasure, spices or apples or other things that delight the palate.

4. And she said to the Lord, "Ah, my Lord, what do you deign to give me to be served the church your spouse in place of the fish, whose story was today recited in the gospel?"* The Lord replied, "I give you the most holy activity of all the limbs of my spotless body, to serve them in place of every negligence by which they have neglected to wait upon me with all the strengths and faculties of their own body; also the activity of my most noble soul, instead of every negligence by which they have neglected to praise, love, and thank me unceasingly for every benefit, with all the powers and affections of the soul." Through seeing the Lord, as described above, accepting the bread and offering thanks to God the Father,* she understood that whenever someone performs a good deed, however small, in praise of God or reads even one Our Father or Hail Mary, or any other prayer or psalm, on behalf

*John 6:1-14

*see John 6:11

of or for the salvation of the whole church, the Son of God immediately accepts it most gratefully as the fruit of his own most holy human nature. Giving thanks for it to God the Father, he blesses it and distributes it, multiplied by that blessing, to the whole church for the profit of eternal salvation.

5. Also during that week anyone can read five Our Fathers in honor of the Lord's sweet-flowing wounds and, kissing them devoutly as has been described, offer some prayer for the amendment of the sins of the whole church and compensation for its neglects, and can be sure to deserve similar profit through the mercy of God.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

THE UTILITY OF MINDFULNESS OF THE LORD'S PASSION: ON *JUDICA* SUNDAY

1. On *Judica* Sunday,[1] when in honor of the Lord's passion, the commemoration of which begins on that day in particular, she had offered herself to the Lord completely, body and soul, to endure and perform both in body and spirit whatever was pleasing to the divine will, she saw the kindly Lord receive such an intention with unspeakable gratitude. She herself, truly inspired by God, began to greet one by one each of the Lord's limbs, tormented by various pains in his passion for our salvation, with the deepest affection of her heart. Thence, whenever she greeted a limb, immediately a divine splendor shone out from that limb and illuminated her soul. And in that splendor she was granted that innocence that the Lord had won for the church through the suffering of that same limb. And when her soul had been miraculously illuminated from each one of the Lord's limbs, and adorned with most worthy innocence, she said to the Lord:

2. "Ah, Lord, now teach me how I might praiseworthily worship your worshipful passion with this

1. Fifth Sunday in Lent (Passion Sunday): so called from the opening words of the introit, *Judica me, Deus*, "Judge me, God"; Ps 42:1.

innocence that your generous loving-kindness has bestowed on me." The Lord replied, "You should often turn over in your mind with gratitude and compassion that anguish in which I, your creator and lord, *being in an agony prayed the longer*,* while I watered the face of the earth with bloody sweat* because of the great violence of that anguish of love and desire. Entrust to me all that you do and all that is done to you, in union with that submission with which I prayed to the Father in that same prayer, *Father, not my will but yours be done*.* And thus may you endure all things, good and bad, in that love with which I send you all things for your salvation. Therefore accept good fortune with gratitude, in union with that love with which I, your lover, condescending to your weakness, obtain it for you, so that through thinking it over you may learn to hope for eternal good fortune. But accept bad fortune in union with that love with which I send it you from a father's faithful love to win for you eternal good." For this reason she decided to read that prayer with which she might greet each limb during that week, that is, "Hail, tender limbs" and so on,[2] which she saw pleased the Lord greatly. Thence let us too not be slow to do the same, so that we may deserve to obtain similar blessedness.

*Luke 22:43 *see Luke 22:44

*Luke 22:42

3. Then during Mass while in the gospel was being read, *You have a devil*,* she was stirred to the depths of her being over the abuse offered the Lord and could not bear seeing her soul's beloved exposed to such un-

*John 8:48, 52

2. The full text of this lengthy prayer appears not in the *Legatus* but in the seventeenth-century compilation, *Preces gertrudianae sive vera et sincera medulla devotissimarum precum . . . revelationibus gertrudis et mechtildis . . .* (Fribourg: Herder, 1903), 148; English trans. in *Preces Gertrudianae: Prayers of St Gertrude and St Mechtilde of the Order of St. Benedict* (London: Burns and Lambert, 1861), 103–5.

deserved insults. She caressed him from the deepest affection of her heart, saying these words to him in reaction: "Hail, life-giving jewel of divine nobility. Hail, unfading flower of human dignity, Jesus most loving: you are my true, supreme, and only salvation." Her kindly lover, making her a most courteous response in his usual way, took her chin in his blessed hand.[3] Bending gently toward her, he instilled these words into her soul's ear with sweetest whisper, saying, "I am your creator, redeemer, and lover: through the anguish of death I have sought you with all my blessedness." Then all the saints, as if stirred to wonder by such wonderful divine condescension, were blessing the Lord with great joy for such a courteous inclination to that soul.

4. Then the Lord said, "If anyone, in opposition to the blasphemies and abuse launched at me on earth, greets me with that love with which you have just greeted me, at that strict Judgment when they are about to be judged in death and oppressed by the accusations of devils, I shall appear to them with the same tenderness that you have just shown me, and I shall console them with the same words, saying, 'I am your creator, redeemer, and lover,' and so on. If the saints in heaven are now so astonished at those words, how much the more do you think they will silence, terrify, and put to flight all the enemies of that soul that deserves to receive at Judgment this gift of consolation from my divine loving-kindness?"

5. Let us therefore be eager to caress the Lord with all the affections of heart and soul as often as any abuse inflicted on him by someone is rehearsed. Even if we cannot do this with the same affection, at least let us

3. Cf. IV.2.12, 48.21, and 51.8.

offer him the intention and desire to have all affection, desire, and love of the whole of creation directed toward God. Let us trust in his generous loving-kindness, that he will not despise the little offerings of his paupers, but rather will accept them according to the riches of his sweet mercy, and at the same time will reward them far beyond their desert.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

SERVICE AND HOSPITALITY FOR THE LORD: ON PALM SUNDAY

1. On the holy day of palms, while she was luxuriating in the pleasure of divine enjoyment, she said to the Lord, "Teach me, most loving one, how I could suitably and laudably go to meet you today, my Lord, my lover, as you come to your passion for my salvation." The Lord replied, "Give me an ass on which I may sit, and *with a crowd going before me* with rejoicing, *a crowd following* with praises,* and a crowd following with service. That is, first you shall provide me with an ass in contrition of heart, by confessing that you have too often neglected to follow reason, and like an ass you have not paid attention to all that my loving-kindness was constantly doing for you, for your salvation. With this neglect you have lost my serene tranquility, as sometimes although I would delight to take pleasure in you spiritually, justice demanded that I should purify you through inner or outer burdens. Thus in a way I was compelled to suffer in you, for the unrestrained love of my divine loving-kindness forces me to feel the profoundest compassion for you in all adversity. When you give me yourself as such an ass, you offer me a sufficiently comfortable seat.

*see Matt 21:9

"Second, you will provide me with a crowd, going before me with joy, by receiving me with the whole

world's love; do this in union with that love with which I, Creator and Lord of all, came to Jerusalem on this day for all the world's salvation, and in compensation for all those who have ever failed to respond to me for this with worthy praise, thanksgiving, love, and service.

"Third, provide me with a crowd following with praises, by confessing that you have never been assiduous in following properly the examples of my most perfect way of life, and by offering me the loving desire that, if you could prompt all people to follow the examples of my most holy way of life and passion in the most perfect way, you would most willingly toil at this to my praise with all your strength. Pray that you in particular may be allowed to follow me, as far as is possible for a human being, with burning desire through true humility, patience, and charity—virtues in which I labored greatly at the time of my passion.

"Fourth, provide me with a crowd following with service, by confessing that you never stood beside me with proper loyalty for the defense of truth and justice, by determining and desiring that from now on, in all that has pleased me, you will be assiduous in promoting the causes of justice and truth in both words and deeds, and you will desire to keep the same intention at all times, to my praise." And the Lord added, "If people give themselves to me in these four ways on behalf of the whole world, I shall certainly come to them so courteously that they will obtain from this the fruit of salvation."

2. Then, when she was about to receive communion and was offering the Lord her heart out of her deepest affection, she saw that heart of hers spread out as wide as charity, like the entire city of Jerusalem opening to receive the Lord. Entering in the likeness of a most charming youth, the Lord seemed to make a scourge from three cords. This scourge symbolized the work of

our redemption. The first cord symbolized the zealous toil of his most innocent body, the second, the devout intention of his most holy soul, and the third, the virtuous nobility of his most excellent divine nature: these three things always worked together in any work of Jesus Christ. Touching all her inner parts most gently with this scourge, the Lord completely eradicated from her all dust of human weakness and negligence. Having done this, he placed the same scourge in the midst of her heart, and suddenly those three cords seemed to serve the Lord as a most tranquil throne. When he had taken his seat on it, each cord put out a most verdant flower; one of these, the virtuous nobility of the divine nature, as if springing up from behind the Lord and bending over his head, seemed to give the Lord the delightful protection of a most welcome breeze. The other two flowers from left and right offered the Lord's countenance glorious fragrance of verdant delight.

3. When at Terce was sung in the hymn the verse, *Hail O Cross, our only hope*,[1] she offered the Lord the devotion of all those who were eager to greet him on that very day with that verse during the seven canonical Hours. Then, holding the flower that came out of the cord of the devout intention of his most holy soul, the Lord offered it to all those women whose devotion she had offered him. From its touch each one acquired at once spiritual splendor and new life. Then she said to the Lord, "My Lord, if these women secure so great a benefit through this devotion, what will you give to them when they apply themselves to you with greater love and devotion after the procession, greeting you with more fervent desire?" The Lord replied, "I shall show them

1. *O crux ave, spes unica*, penultimate verse of the hymn *Vexilla Regis* ("The royal standards forward go").

the loveliness of each of the flowers, for at that moment they will present their devotion to me in three different ways. For some women who desire to have devotion but do not have it will present me with the zeal of labor and of physical exertion. These women I will renew from the flower that grows out of the zealous exertion of my most innocent body. Some women who abound in the sweetness of devotion will present me with their affection and desires. These too I shall restore from the flower growing out of the devout intention of my most holy soul. And some, whose will is united to my divine will in all things, and who through this have become *one spirit** with me, will offer themselves completely to me to be at my disposal. And I shall breathe on those from the flower of my most noble divine nature for their salvation." After the procession, while the community was bowing at "Glory, laud"[2] and was prostrating itself at "With shining palms,"[3] at each of these the Lord was extending to them the flower of the zealous exertion of his body to renew, strengthen, and preserve them in his service, indicating by this that he ennobled such exertions with his own most holy labors.

*see 1 Cor 6:17

4. After this, when someone asked her to revive herself with food since she was extremely weak, as she shrank from eating before she had heard the Lord's passion, she asked the Lord in her usual way what she was to do. The Lord replied to her, "Take refreshment, beloved, in union with that love with which I, your lover,

2. The opening of the hymn *Gloria, laus* ("All glory, laud, and honor").

3. *Fulgentibus palmis prosternimur advenienti domino*; "With shining palms we prostrate ourselves before the Lord as he comes"; antiphon for the Day Hours on Palm Sunday; see John 12:13.

refused on the cross to drink myrrh *mingled with gall, when* I *had tasted it*."* When she had submitted her will to this with thanksgiving, the Lord offered her his heart, saying, "Look: here I present to you, in the cup that commemorates that verse, *When he had tasted he would not drink*,* that desire that restrained me from drinking that drink but allowed me to keep it for you to drink. Therefore drink confidently what I, most experienced of physicians, have tasted before you, and by this have concocted something extremely healthy for you to drink. I was offered myrrh mingled with gall so that I might die the more quickly; therefore the desire to suffer much for humankind restrained me from drinking. But in the same love you, on the contrary, should take all things that are necessary and profitable, so that through them you may be sustained the longer in my service."

*see Matt 27:34

*Matt 27:34

5. "And finally consider three things through the cup that was offered me: the wine was mixed with myrrh and mingled with gall. You too should carefully consider in its likeness anything that you find serviceable in three different ways: first, you should do all things to my praise with joy of spirit, which is symbolized by the wine. Second, act with the intention of accepting as serviceable anything that enables you to suffer the longer for my love, and this is the symbolism of the myrrh, which preserves from rot and corruption. Third, for my love, insofar as it pleases me, be willing to do without the joy of my most delightful presence, which is in heaven, and to be in this vale of misery: this is symbolized by the gall. As often as you accept anything serviceable with such an intention, I shall welcome it as a friend welcomes it from his friend if the latter drains the gall offered the other and gives him to drink instead the sweetest nectar."

6. While she was eating, at each bite she was ruminating in her heart on this prayer, saying, "May the

power of your divine love incorporate me completely into you, most loving Jesus." Similarly at each sip she said this prayer: "Infuse and preserve in the depths of my being, most loving Jesus, the force of charity that prevailed so powerfully in the depths of your being that you did not take the drink prepared for you on the cross to hasten your death, but for our sakes put it aside to suffer many things for us. May that same force of love, penetrating all my being, continually drop down through all the motions, forces, and faculties of my body and soul, to your eternal praise." She asked the Lord how he would receive a similar devotion from others. The Lord replied, "As often as anyone eats a single mouthful with such a devotion, I shall declare that I have eaten with them and am intoxicated with them by this, as if I had drunk with them so many love potions that had inflamed our affections most ardently toward each other, and in accordance with my divine omnipotence, at the appropriate time I shall courteously manifest that love's affection."

*Matt 27:50

7. Then when *He yielded up his spirit** was being read in the passion, her body prostrate on the ground from excess of love, she said, "Look, my Lord! With my body completely prostrate in honor of your precious death, I ask, through that love that compelled you, giver of life to all creatures, to die, that you put to death in my soul all that is displeasing to you." The Lord answered her, "Exhale now all the vices and failings that you wish to die in you, and inhale from my breath all that you wish to have from my virtuous perfection, and you shall undoubtedly know that you will obtain in my sight complete pardon for all that you have just exhaled and the saving effect of all that you inhaled from my breath. And as often as you are assiduous in the future to toil for the conquest of the failings you have just exhaled, or for the acquisition of virtues that you have just inhaled

from me, you will always carry off double fruit, that is, that of my passion and that of your victory."

8. Then after the midday meal she had laid her exhausted limbs on her bed, intending to rest—not to sleep but to escape from the disturbance of too frequent visitors. She said to the Lord, "Look, Lord! I am turning away from every creature in mindfulness of the most salvific preaching with which you labored in the temple throughout today, and intent on you alone, my lover, I desire you to speak to my soul."* The Lord said to her, "Just as the divine nature reposes in my human nature, so the delight of my divine nature takes its rest in your exhaustion." When she noticed that people were leaving her alone so as not to disturb her, thinking that she was asleep, she asked the Lord whether she should tell them that she was not asleep, so as not to hinder them from doing whatever they wished. The Lord replied, "No: allow them to earn by their charitable efforts the reward of charity, which I so greatly delight to pay." And the Lord added, "Behold, I have just put before you two topics that may inspire you to the pursuit of greater things by exerting yourself in meditation: consider that the most useful things that people can do in this life are to exhaust themselves in such labors in which my divine nature delights to take its rest, or to reach out in this way toward their neighbor in works of charity."

*see Hos 2:14

9. Now when it was evening, mindful of that courtesy with which the Lord is said to have gone to Mary and Martha in Bethany late on that very day,* violently inflamed by that desire to entertain the Lord, she went to an image of the crucified. Kissing the wound in the most holy side with deepest love, she drew in to herself every desire of the most loving heart of the Son of God, praying with the force of all the prayers that had ever poured forth from that same heart, that he would condescend to

*see Mark 11:11

turn aside to the guesthouse of her most unworthy heart. The kindly *Lord, who is always there for all those who call upon him,** made known his longed-for presence and said with serene tenderness, "Here I am. What are you going to give me?" And that woman said, "You are most welcome, my only salvation, and my complete, or rather only true good!" And she added, "Alas! my Lord, unworthy that I am I have prepared nothing that could be fit for your divine magnificence; but I offer all my substance to your loving-kindness, desiring and praying that you yourself will condescend to prepare in me whatever greatly pleases your divine kindliness toward me." The Lord replied, "If you bestow on me this freedom toward you, give me the key to everything, so that I can freely take and replace whatever I please, both for use and for refreshment." She said, "What is this key?" The Lord replied, "Your own will."

*Ps 144:18

10. In these words she understood that those who long to receive the Lord as a guest must hand over the key of their own will, commending themselves completely to his most praiseworthy good pleasure and trusting confidently to his most kindly loving-kindness that in all things he is working their salvation. Then the Lord enters and carries out in their heart and soul every desire of his divine pleasure. Then, divinely inspired, she read 225 times,[4] on behalf of all the parts of her body, this verse from the gospel: "*Not my will but yours be done*,* most loving Jesus." She perceived that this was greatly pleasing to the Lord. Then she asked the Lord how he received it if someone celebrated the present feast with a devotion she herself had written to celebrate it, taking material from the book of Esther and

*Luke 22:42

4. Cf. IV.2.7 and IV.35.10.

beginning the composition with "Go forth, daughters of Jerusalem."* He replied, "This is how I receive with thanks that celebration in my divine heart: if someone is eager to perform it with devout intention, after every reward that I shall grant them for each of their good deeds in the life eternal, I shall also prepare a wedding feast in accordance with the munificence of my divine generosity. From this they shall have great dignity, joy, and delight before others, just as a bride has in her wedding feast before others, a bride on whom the king lavishes abundant gifts according to his generosity for the sake of her love and honor."

*see Song 3:11

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

THE ACCEPTABILITY OF GENUFLECTION: WEDNESDAY

1. On the following Wednesday, while they were beginning the Mass, *In the name of the Lord*,[1] out of the deepest affection of her heart she was genuflecting in honor of that most worthy name, in recompense for all those things that she had ever failed to do in reverence for God. Since she had perceived that the Lord greatly welcomed this, she genuflected a second time at the phrase *of those that are in heaven*, in recompense for all those things that the saints who now rule in heaven together with the Lord have ever failed to do in God's praise. Then all the saints, rising up with greatest thanksgiving, were praising the Lord for having bestowed this grace on her, and were praying for her. Third, at that phrase *on earth*, she genuflected in recompense for all those things that the universal church has failed, and does fail, to do in the divine praise. Then the Son of God with kindly joy rendered to her the fruit of all the devotion that the universal church was offering him. Fourth, at that phrase, *and under the earth*, she genuflected in the same way in recompense for all those things that

1. *In nomine Jesu omne genu flectatur, celestium, terrestrium, et infernorum*; "In the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those that are in heaven, on earth, and under the earth." Introit for the Wednesday in Holy Week; see Phil 2:10.

those who are damned in hell had failed to do. Then the Son of God, rising up and standing before God the Father, said, "This belongs to me, for since *you, Father, have given me all judgment*,* by the just judgment of my most impartial truth I have allotted eternal torments to the damned. And so I take such great pleasure in this recompense from this woman that human understanding cannot conceive her reward: it is reserved for the future, when she will become capable of eternal blessedness."

*John 5:22

2. Now when they were reading *Father, forgive them** in the passion, she was beseeching the Lord with deepest affection that, in that love with which he prayed in his passion for his crucifiers, he would condescend to forgive all those who had ever sinned against her in any way. At this all the saints, rising up with great wonder, were praying the Lord to forgive her in whatever way she had sinned against any of them by not celebrating their feasts with due devotion, or in some other way not venerating them sufficiently. The Son of God, too, coming before God the Father, offered on her behalf the fruit of all his most holy life, in most courteous amendment of everything in which she had ever sinned against him, in thought, word, and deed.

*Luke 23:34

3. Now while they were reciting *Today you shall be with me in Paradise*,* she understood through the spirit that, just as no one wins worthy fruit of penitence at death unless fitted for it, with God's help, by some virtue in this life, so that thief who gained such saving fruit of penitence that on that very day he rejoiced with the Lord in the delights of Paradise he had been fitted for it by the fact that, although he was a criminal and dedicated to banditry, nonetheless wherever he recognized a manifest injustice he always resisted and rebuked it. He did this on the cross, too, by arguing with his companion about his abuse of the Lord's majesty, and by confessing that

*Luke 23:43

he was guilty and justly condemned. That is why he won mercy from God.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

THE LITURGY AT THE LORD'S SUPPER

1. On the feast of the Lord's Supper, while Lamentations[1] were being chanted at Matins, she stood before God the Father and in bitterness of heart on behalf of the whole world bewailed to him all sins ever committed out of human weakness against divine omnipotence. Then at the second Lamentation she stood before the Son of God, making complaint in the same way concerning all sins committed against God's unsearchable wisdom out of human ignorance. At the third Lamentation she bewailed to the Holy Spirit all sins that had ever been committed with evil intent against his goodness. Then while at the verse *O Jesu Christ*[2] and so on the young women were chanting, "Lord have mercy," during the first one she approached the sweetest heart of Jesus Christ and, kissing it devoutly, besought remission on behalf of the whole church for all sins that had ever been perpetrated in thoughts, desires, affections, and perverse intentions. Then during *Christ have mercy* kissing the Lord's blessed mouth, she asked forgiveness for all sins

1. A portion of the biblical book included within the service of Tenebrae.

2. *Jesu Christe qui passurus advenisti propter nos*; "Jesu Christ, you who are about to suffer have come for our sakes"; verse from the Litany chanted at Tenebrae.

ever committed by the mouth. Similarly, during *Lord have mercy* kissing the Lord's most worshipful hands, she won forgiveness for all sins committed through their actions by anyone in the church. Then during those five repetitions of *Lord have mercy* that the congregation chanted at the hymn *Christ the King*,[3] at every single verse she kissed the Lord's five rosy wounds, for the forgiveness of all sins committed by the five senses. While she was doing this, immediately five little rivulets of saving grace began to gush with copious force from the five wounds themselves. Flowing through the whole church, they purified it from every spot of sin. In this way <Gertrud> perceived that she had won the complete implementation of all the things for which she had prayed both during Lamentations and also during *Lord have mercy*. So on these three nights[4] anyone can concentrate on those same things, trusting in the divine goodness that if they have toiled devoutly in such activities, they will deserve a similar result.

2. Now when the antiphon *He was offered*[5] was being chanted at Lauds, the Lord said to her, "If you believe that I was offered to God the Father on the cross, because it was my own will to be offered him in this way, you should also believe unquestioningly that with the same love I still long every day to be offered for each and every sinner to God the Father, to whom I offered myself on the cross for the salvation of the whole world.

3. The hymn *Rex Christe factor omnium*, "O Christ our King, Creator, Lord," attributed to Gregory the Great. For another reference to this hymn, see III.45.2.

4. At Helfta this hymn was sung at the end of Lauds on the three days preceding Easter.

5. *Oblatus est quia ipse voluit et peccata nostra ipse portavit*; "He was offered because it was his own will and he himself bore our sins"; fourth antiphon at Lauds; see Isa 53:7.

And so if anyone feels weighed down by any burden of sin, let them breathe freely in hope of pardon, offering to God the Father my most innocent passion and death, and let them believe that through this they will win most saving fruit of forgiveness, for no one could have any remedy on earth so efficacious against sin as devout mindfulness of my passion, with true penitence and right faith."

3. And when in the gospel *Before the festival day*,* they were reading the words *he began to wash his disciples' feet*,* she said to the Lord, "Ah, Lord, since I am not worthy to be washed by you, would that I might at least deserve to be washed from every stain of sin by one of your most blessed disciples, whom you the Lord of all creation deigned to wash, so that today I might worthily approach the mystery of your most holy Body and Blood." The Lord replied, "Today I have indeed washed and wiped away your stains and also those of all who, following your teaching, have asked that their seven affections[6] be purified and ordered by me." Then she said, "Alas! my Lord, even though I taught this to others, and also intended to carry it out, nonetheless in concentrating on other things I neglected this." The Lord replied, "I took your virtuous will for the deed, for my generous goodness demands that if anyone intended with their whole will to do some good work or to concentrate on some devotion, if they fail to do it from human weakness or necessity, I shall regard their will as the deed, and at the same time I shall generously reward it."

*John 13:1-15

*John 13:5

4. Now when she was about to receive communion, she said to the Lord, "Ah, Lord, I offer you the petitions

6. See IV.2.6 and n. 5.

of all the people who have entrusted themselves to my unworthy prayers." The Lord replied, "You have fired my divine heart with as many flames of love as those people on whose behalf you stand before me." Then she said, "Ah, how could I worthily stand before you on behalf of the individual members of the whole church, to set your deified heart on fire with as many flames of love as there are people in the universal church?" The Lord replied, "If you wish to do this, you can do so in these four ways: first, praise me for the creation of all those whom I have created *to my image and likeness*;* second, give me thanks for all the blessings that have ever been, or will be, bestowed on them; third, bemoan all the ways in which they have ever opposed my grace; fourth, pray for them all that each and every one may be perfected in all good in accordance with my divine plan, to my praise and glory."

*Gen 1:26

5. Another time when on the feast of the Lord's Supper she had completely recollected herself within to concentrate on God and to be at his disposal, the Lord showed himself to her in that form and manner in which he had appeared that day on earth about to die. He seemed to find that day most wearisome, as if in the supreme anguish of death, since he, the eternal wisdom of God the Father, foresaw all that would befall him and everything that he would suffer, just as if it had already taken place. And since he was the most tender son of a tender virgin, quaking and trembling hour by hour he displayed various most wretched gestures and changes of color, as if minute by minute he were undergoing the bitterness itself of death. Sensing this in spirit, she was spurred to such great compassion that, if she had had the strength of a thousand hearts, she could have exhausted them all that day from compassion for so lovable and sweet a lover. And so, from desire and

love together and alternately from the fear of death, she experienced most violent heartbeats, which moved that sweet-flowing heart filled with every blessedness; from their overwhelming force she nearly collapsed completely.

6. And the Lord said to her, "In that same love in which during my mortal life I bore in my body every fear, tribulation, and bitterness of suffering and death for human salvation, although I have now become immortal, I have today endured in your heart its frequent disturbance from intimate compassion with my fears and bitterness and its transition to the true salvation of all those who are to be saved. Hence through this compassion with which you have suffered with me during this day, I grant you every fruit of my most worshipful passion and precious death, for the increase of your eternal blessedness. Also I add this honor to your heart that has suffered with me in this way: wherever the wood of the cross, which served me as my torment, is adored, your soul will receive together with it the fruit of the intimate compassion that it showed me during this day. And I add something else: any cause for which you pray shall never be contrary to my good pleasure but shall end in success."

7. The Lord added, "Whenever you wish to pray for some cause, place before me my heart, which I have often given you in sign of mutual intimacy, in union with that love with which I took that human heart for human salvation. I have often given it you as a prerogative of special friendship, so that I may benefit those for whom you pray from it, just as a treasure chest is set before a rich man from which he takes what he needs to benefit his friends." Then she asked the Lord, "Ah, Lord, with what name did you call on the Father when you were praying in your agony?" The Lord replied, "I

often called on him with this name, saying: 'Oh totality of my being!' "

8. During Mass, before the convent was to receive communion, the Lord Jesus appeared to her during the secret, not sitting but lying as if breathing his last. He seemed so completely deprived of all his strength that, as she looked, all her innermost parts were moved so that her spirit almost failed. And while he was lying in this way, as if in his final wretchedness, up to the time when the community was to receive communion, she saw in a wonderful vision that the priest, elevating him whose body was much larger than his own, was upholding him by whom not only was he upheld but who also *upholds all things with the word of His power*.* Then, seeing this, she understood with sweetest love of delightful compassion that that weakness displayed earlier in the Son of Almighty God expressed that most powerful strength of delightful love by which *Benjamin, a* loveable *youth, was caught up in ecstasy of mind*,* in the delights of those expectations by which he desired to be united through communion with souls so beloved to him. For this reason, as if faint and completely unable to use his own strength, he was handled and upheld by the hands of the priest. Again, on another occasion she understood that as often as a person looks with devout desire upon the Host in which the body of Christ lies hidden in sacramental form, he increases his reward in heaven. For in the future vision of God as many special delights will dally with them eternally as the number of times they looked on the Body of Christ with devout desire on earth, or even wanted to see it if they could but were prevented for good reason.

*Heb 1:3

*see Ps 67:28

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

GOOD FRIDAY

1. Although from what has already been written it is quite clear that both on festival days and on weekdays <Gertrud> was often intent on the Lord with assiduous devotion, I think that I should emphasize the fact that she ardently and as it were with abandon embraced with the greatest devotion the mindfulness of Christ's sweetest passion. She seemed to ruminate on it as if it were to her "honey in the mouth, melody in the ear, joy in the heart."[1] For at the approach of most holy Good Friday, when she heard the sound of the clapper at Compline, she was moved to her innermost being with all the strength of her heart. She seemed to sense in advance the announcement of the agony of her one and only, most faithful and most loving friend, and, gasping for breath, she hastened to his death. But with a supreme effort she withdrew to her inmost being, to the recollection of the Lord's passion and through loving compassion to repay her beloved, who had suffered for her, for his most faithful love. And thus throughout that day, and also the following most Holy Saturday, she had her soul firmly united to the soul of her beloved, so much so that she found it extremely difficult to divert her physical senses to anything, except only to those

1. See Bernard of Clairvaux, SC 15.III.6, trans. Kilian Walsh, Works 2, CF 4 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1976), 110; and *Legatus* III.41.4.

things that she could accomplish through the power of love. To these she willingly gave herself without hesitation whenever the opportunity offered. Through this she clearly demonstrated that she truly held in her embrace, in the guest chamber of her inmost being, him of whom John says, *God is love,** and so on. *If we love one another, God remains in us, and love is perfected in us.**

*1 John 4:8

*1 John 4:12

2. Hence she spent the greater part of this most holy day and also of the following Saturday as if bereft of her senses. In addition she very often remained so caught up above them that she could not convey to human understanding by means of any mental images what she drew into herself from reciprocal intimacy with her beloved, who was sweetly united to her by such a strong bond, and from such loving compassion so inseparably mingled with her. And Bernard witnesses, on that verse in the Song of Songs, *We will make chains of gold*,* that this is not a mark of imperfection but of supreme perfection: "When the spirit is ravished out of itself and granted a vision of God that suddenly shines into the mind with the swiftness of a lightning flash, immediately images of earthly things fill the imagination, either as an aid to understanding or to temper the intensity of the divine light. So well adapted are they to the divinely illumined senses that in their shadow the utterly pure and brilliant radiance of the truth is rendered more bearable to the mind and more capable of being communicated to others. My opinion is that they are formed in us by the inspirations of the holy angels,"[2] which is their function. Therefore "we feel that the being of God in its pure state is perceived without any shadow of corporeal substances. The elegance of the imagery that

*Song 1:10

2. Bernard of Clairvaux, SC 41.3, trans. Kilian Walsh, Works 3, CF 7 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian, 1976), 206 (adapted).

so worthily clothes and reveals it I attribute to angelic skill."[3] These are Bernard's words. Therefore it is not to be deemed of less merit if God condescends to flow into a soul himself and keeps it between that soul and himself alone, under the seal of more loving intimacy, "in its pure state . . . without any shadow of corporeal substances." For a similar reason very many things are quite often veiled in silence that would be worthy of a magnificent account.

3. However, lest that most solemn feast should fail to profit the devout who seek in these writings to grow more fervent, I shall add a few little sparks that could fly out of that furnace, burning strongly in memory of Christ's passion.

4. On one Good Friday, when around Prime she was rendering devout thanks to God for his willingness to be judged by an unbeliever,[4] she saw the Son of God himself, serene in perfect joy, sitting on the imperial throne with God the Father, who with wonderful sweetness was soothing him for all the insults and blasphemies suffered for our redemption. She saw each one of the saints pay homage to the Son of God, kneeling with the greatest gratitude that they had been freed by his trial from eternal damnation.

5. Now when they were reading *I thirst** in the passion, the Lord appeared to hold out a golden chalice to catch tears of devotion. When she felt her heart melt in tears, on the verge of shedding them, and was nonetheless holding them back, both because of discretion and also because of a sense of devout privacy, she asked the Lord how he received this. Then she saw a most pure little stream flow into the Lord's mouth from the heart of her

*John 19:28

3. Bernard of Clairvaux, SC 41.4, CF 7:207 (adapted).

4. *sarraceno*, i.e., Pontius Pilate.

soul, and meanwhile received the Lord's reply in these words: "This is how I draw to myself the tears of devotion that are held back with such purity for my sake."

6. Then, around Terce, mindful that at that hour the Lord was crowned with thorns, dreadfully scourged at the pillar, and condescended to carry the cross on his weary and bloodied shoulders, she was most ardently inflamed. She said to the Lord, "Look, my sweetest lover, in response to your love, for such undeserved bitterness of your most innocent passion I show you my heart, desiring to bear every bitterness and sorrow of your sweetest heart and spotless body, from this hour until the hour of my death. I pray that, whenever their memory slips from my mind out of human weakness, you should make me feel a physical pain in my heart that may worthily respond to the bitterness of your passion." The Lord replied, "Such an intention and the fidelity of your heart is sufficient response to me. But so that I may have complete delight in your heart, give me the freedom to create and keep in it whatever I wish, without your determining whether I will pour sweetness or bitterness into it!"

7. Now while they were reading in the passion that Joseph took away the body of Jesus,* she said to the Lord, "That blessed Joseph was given your most holy body, Lord. But what will be given me from your body, unworthy though I am?" The Lord promptly offered her his sweetest heart in the form of a golden censer, from which as many fragrant wisps of smoke were wafting up to God the Father as the kinds of people for whom the Lord suffered death. And when, following the church's ritual, prayers were made after the passion with genuflections for the individual orders of the church, the priest saying, *Let us pray, dearly beloved*, and so on, the individual prayers of the whole church seemed to

*see John 19:38-40

mingle and simultaneously waft up together with that most fragrant smoke that was wafting up from the censer of the divine heart. From this mingling the individual prayers of the church were taking on a wonderful splendor and most delightful exhalation. Thence everyone should be eager to pray devoutly for the church on that day on which Christ's passion is wont to support our prayers so powerfully in the sight of God the Father.

8. Another time, while she was being sweetly affected on Good Friday in mindfulness of the Lord's passion, and out of the depths of her heart's affection was longing to repay her beloved for such great love, she said to the Lord, "Ah, teach me, only hope and salvation of my soul, how to respond to you, at least a little, for your passion, most bitter to you and most saving for me." To this the Lord replied, "If anyone follows another's opinion and not their own, they repay me for the arrest by which at the hour of Matins I was taken, bound, and affected by many injuries for human salvation. Those who humbly admit they are guilty recompense me for the trial at which at the hour of Prime I was accused by many false witnesses and condemned to death. Those who restrain their senses from pleasure repay me for the scourges that I suffered at the hour of Terce. And those who submit to bad-tempered superiors soothe my crown of thorns. Those who are injured but are the first to make peace recompense me for carrying the cross. If any, too, overstretch themselves in works of charity for their neighbor, they repay me for the stretching that at the hour of Sext I suffered on the cross. Also, those who, to restrain a neighbor from sin, submit to the weight of abuse or tribulation repay me for my death that I underwent at the hour of None for human salvation. Whoever is reviled but answers humbly as it were takes me down from the cross. Whoever

puts their neighbor first, thinking him more worthy of great honor or profit or some other good thing, repays me for my burial."

9. On another Good Friday when, about to receive communion, she was praying the Lord that he would prepare her worthily, she received this answer: "I am hastening toward you with such great desire that I can hardly contain myself. I have gathered together in my bosom all that has been done today throughout the whole church in memory of my passion, through thoughts, words, and deeds, so that in the sacrament of my Body I may pour them into you all at once for your eternal salvation." To this she replied, "I thank you, blessed Lord, but I would like that gift to be given me in such a way that I could pass it on to more people, to whomsoever I liked." Then the Lord said smiling, "And what are all of you[5] giving me, beloved, since you want me to give you so generous a gift?" To this she replied, "Alas! my beloved, I have nothing that could be worthy of you; nonetheless it is my intention that, if I had all that you have, I would willingly renounce it and give it all to you so generously that you could give it to whomever you wished." To this the Lord kindly replied, "If you find in your heart that you would like to do this for me, you should be completely confident that I wish to do the same thing for you, and as much more in addition as my loving-kindness and my love outweigh yours." She said, "And with what courtesy shall I come to meet you, since you, so liberal, deign to come to me?" The Lord replied, "I ask nothing from you except that you should come, empty, to receive me; for through my gift you will receive in its entirety all that

5. *vos*: Christ usually addresses Gertrud with forms of the second-person-singular personal pronoun *tu*.

I find pleasing in you." From this she understood that that emptiness was humility, by which she considered herself to have nothing at all from her own merits, nor could she do anything except by God's freely given gift, and in addition, all that she could do she reckoned as nothing.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

THE RESURRECTION OF THE LORD

1. Then on the most glorious night of the surpassingly excellent Resurrection of the Lord, while she was devoutly attentive to prayer before Matins, the Lord Jesus appeared to her, radiant and lovely, in the glory of divine majesty and of the beauty of immortality. Throwing herself humbly at his feet she worshiped him most devoutly and said, "Since you, radiant bridegroom, honor and glory of the angels,[1] have deigned to choose me, least of all your creatures, as your bride, and from the depths of my heart and the inmost parts of my soul I yearn and thirst for the praise and glory of you alone, and consider your friends to be closest to me, I therefore ask, most loving one, that at this hour you should deign to absolve the souls of all your special friends in honor of your most joyous resurrection. To win this, I offer you in union with your most innocent passion all the suffering of my heart and body that I have undergone in my continual sicknesses."

2. Then the Lord with wonderful gentleness brought before her a crowd of souls freed from pain, saying, "Here you are! I am consigning all these souls to your love as a bridal gift; for in heaven it shall eternally appear that they are freed by your prayers, and in the sight

1. See the hymn *Christe, sanctorum decus angelorum*, "Christ, the fair glory of the holy angels."

of all my saints this will perpetually yield you honor." Then she said, "How great is their number?" The Lord replied, "Only my divine knowledge encompasses their number." And when she grasped that, although those souls were freed from punishment, they were nonetheless not yet delivered to eternal joys, she offered herself completely to the divine loving-kindness to suffer in heart and body whatever he pleased, so that he would deign to bestow full blessedness on those souls. Then the Lord, conciliated, raised them all to the joys of heaven at the same moment. A little after this, while she was experiencing a severe pain in her side and was kneeling before an image of the cross, the Lord bestowed her toil and sorrow on those souls to increase their joys, saying, "I present you with this devout gift offered me by my bride from her great love, to increase your eternal blessedness. Be sure to honor her in return for this with worthy honor, by repaying her with the gifts of your prayers."

3. After this, the fire of love again driving her on, she presented herself to the Lord, saying, "Here I am, my only lover! I, most unworthy, stand before you, King of kings and Lord, with love, offering you the substance of my body and soul to serve you as long as I shall live for the glory of your worshipful resurrection." To this the Lord replied, "And I shall use this gift of your virtuous will as the royal scepter of my divine magnificence, and in the sight of the Holy Trinity and of all saints shall glory forever in this, given me by you, my beloved." She replied, "Although I made you this vow, my Lord, because you granted it me, I am nonetheless afraid that from human inconstancy I will quickly consign it to oblivion." The Lord replied, "What of it? I shall never let my scepter fall from my hand once it has been offered me, but shall keep it perpetually as a symbol and

reminder of your love for me. And as often as you renew this intention to me, that scepter will blossom in my hand with most delightful flowers and will be encrusted with precious stones."

4. Now while she was straining all her strength and her senses, both inner and outer, in this devout intention, she was preparing to sing Matins to the glory of the Lord's resurrection. When the invitatory Alleluia was intoned, she said to the Lord, "Instruct me, kindest teacher, with what devotion I might praise you through the Alleluia, which is repeated so often on this feast." The Lord replied, "You could join most suitably in praising me through the Alleluia in union with the praise of the inhabitants of heaven, who perpetually join in praise through that same word in heaven." And the Lord added, "Note that in that word *Alleluia* are found all the vowels except for 'o', which symbolizes sorrow, and in its place the first vowel, that is 'a', is doubled. So through 'a', praise me in union with that most excellent praise with which all the saints, rejoicing together, extol the surpassingly sweet delight of the divine in-flowing into my deified human nature, now raised up by the glory of immortality in return for the manifold bitterness of my passion and death, which I suffered for human salvation. Through 'e', praise the most beautiful delight of most welcome springtime loveliness that delighted the eyes of my human nature in the flowery meadows of the sovereign and undivided Trinity. Through 'u', too, praise that sweetest delight that ravished the ears of my deified human nature in the sweet-sounding caresses of the ever-worshipful Trinity, and in the tireless praises of all angels and saints. Through 'i', extol the most delicious perfume of the welcome breeze that, through the sweetest breath of the Holy Trinity, gratefully refreshed the nostrils of my now immortal human nature. Next,

through 'a', which is repeated in place of 'o', join in praising the magnificent, incomprehensible, and inestimable in-flowing of the divine nature in its entirety into my deified human nature. That has now become immortal and impassible and enjoys the redoubled pleasure of the divine in-flowing in place of the physical sense of touch, which I lack."

5. After this, while she was proceeding to chant Matins, she received from each and every psalm, response, and reading most sweet and fitting insights of spiritual delights, which most aptly suited the feast of the most joyful Resurrection together with the shared love and spiritual enjoyment of God's union with her soul. These insights could greatly delight the soul of the devout reader; I am however omitting them all, and very many others too, for the sake of brevity, lest prolixity should engender distaste. I entrust them to the divine favor, from which have proceeded these and all the blessings generously lavished on his chosen one.

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

THE FOLLOWING MONDAY: SCRUTINY OF HER LIFE IN RELIGION

1. On the Monday, about to receive communion, she was beseeching the Lord that through that most worthy sacrament he would deign to compensate for everything that she had neglected in the observance of the religious life. Catching her up, the Son of God presented her to God the Father dressed in the habit of religion: this habit seemed to be constructed from as many separate sections as the number of years she had lived in religion, so that the lower part of the habit was deemed to represent the first year, the second the second year, and from there on up to the current year. And that habit seemed so taut and smooth that no hint of a fold could hide anything on it, but in each year there appeared, separately noted, all the days and hours, and in addition all the thoughts, words, and deeds, both good and evil, that she had accomplished day after day, hour after hour, thought after thought, word after word, deed after deed, and what she had intended by the individual words and deeds—that is, whether <she had intended> the love of God and profit of her neighbor, or to curry favor or harm someone. It also showed, in anything serviceable, or any act of abstinence, or any deed whatsoever, whether she had done it from pure obedience or on her own initiative. Where she had flattered herself on some deed, as if she

had done from obedience something for which she had really obtained license on her own initiative from her superiors, or for which she had extracted permission through some shrewd opportunity, truly, such deeds of obedience appeared on that habit like little jewels set in slippery mud, loose as if about to fall off and held in position with difficulty.

2. While the Son of God was praying for her and offering his own most innocent and perfect life to God the Father, that tunic seemed completely covered by a most splendid and translucent layer of gold. Through it, all that has been mentioned before of thoughts, words, and deeds, and also of intentions, exigencies, or deceits, which either knowingly or unknowingly, voluntarily or under coercion, she had done at any time or hour, shone through as clearly and distinctly as an underlying color can be discerned through pure crystal. Not even the least speck of dust or tiny mark could escape notice, but in the light of the knowledge of infallible truth was most clearly visible, both to God and also to all those in heaven. She understood from this by divine grace that anyone's condition is similarly obvious to God and all the saints throughout eternity. But what the Lord says through the prophet, "In what hour so ever the sinner turns,"[1] and so on, should be understood in this way: the Lord will not remember sins any longer, to judge them, if they have been wiped clean by suitable penitence. Nevertheless, every stain of our sins shall perpetually appear on us, to the praise and glory of his sweetest mercy by which he has so kindly forgiven the penitent their sins, and in addition has surrounded us with the manifold blessings of his divine

1. Pseudo-Ezek 33:12; see IV.2.1, n. 2.

loving-kindness, as if we had never offended against him in anything. Also, every single one of our good deeds, thoughts, words, and intentions that we have ever completed for the love and praise of God shall similarly flourish for ever to his praise, by whose gift and by whose help we completed them all, and to the increase of our joys. Thus in return we shall always praise and love God, who lives and reigns in perfect Trinity and *who works all things in us all*.* *1 Cor 12:6

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

RENEWAL OF HER SPIRITUAL MARRIAGE

1. On the Tuesday, while about to receive communion once again, she was requesting the Lord that through the same life-giving sacrament he would deign to renew in her soul the spiritual marriage by which she had been betrothed to him in spirit through faith and the religious life, and also through the integrity of virginal chastity. The Lord replied with charming serenity, saying, "This I shall undoubtedly do." And thus bending down to her with the greatest courtesy he drew her to himself with a most charming embrace and implanted a surpassingly sweet kiss on her soul. Through this kiss he renewed in her an inner agitation of spirit, and through the embrace he seemed to impress on her breast a most splendid brooch, set with precious stones and marvelous enameling. Through this he restored in her whatever she had neglected in spiritual exercises in which she could have labored.

CHAPTER THIRTY

WEDNESDAY: SPIRITUAL FERTILITY

1. Then on Wednesday she desired that the Lord would make her fertile in worthy fruits of virtues through the efficacy of his body. The Lord replied, "I shall certainly make you bear fruit in me, and through you I shall draw many to myself." She replied, "Lord, how could you draw anyone to yourself through me, unworthy as I am, since I have now for the most part lost the gift of speaking and instructing others that I once had in abundance?" The Lord replied, "If you had the gift of speaking, you would perhaps think that it was your eloquence that drew people to me. Therefore I have partially deprived you of it, so that you may realize that you are able to do this not by yourself, but by my special grace." The Lord *opened his most sacred mouth and panted*,* saying, "As I just now panted, so shall I indeed draw to myself all those who, with love and devotion for me, turn toward you, and I shall cause them to progress day by day."

*Ps 118:131

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

HOW USEFUL IT IS TO ENTRUST ALL ONE'S WORKS TO GOD

1. On the Thursday, while the passage *She stooped down, and looked into the sepulcher, and saw two angels** was being read in the gospel about Saint Mary Magdalene, <Gertrud> said to the Lord, "Where is the sepulcher, Lord, into which I could look and find the delight of consolation?" Then the Lord showed her the wound in his side. While she was stooping down to it, she perceived from within, as if in the place of the two angels, these two sentences spoken to her. The first was, "You could never depart from my company," and the second was, "All your works please me in most perfect fashion." Stunned at this, she hesitantly asked how this could be, since she was so imperfect in everything that none of her works could please anyone on earth, because of the hidden defect that at some time they would detect in them. How then could they please his most clear-sighted knowledge, which sees a thousand defects where human blindness can scarcely detect one? The Lord replied, "If you were holding something in your hand that you could easily improve and knew just how to do so in such a way that it would please everyone, you would certainly do it, if your intention were good. Similarly, because it is your practice to entrust your works to me quite frequently, I hold them in my hand, as it were, and

*John 20:11-12

since from my omnipotence I am able, and from my unsearchable wisdom I know how to, from my kindliness I do indeed take pleasure in improving all your works in this way, so that they can rightly please both me and all those in heaven."

CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

ON THE OCTAVE DAY OF EASTER: HOW SHE RECEIVED THE HOLY SPIRIT

1. On the octave of the Lord's Resurrection, while they were reading in the gospel that the Lord gave his disciples the Holy Spirit through breathing on them,* she was praying the Lord with devout intention that he should deign to lavish on her, too, his sweetly flowing spirit. The Lord answered her, "If you desire to receive the Holy Spirit, you must first, like my disciples, search my side and my hands."* She understood from these words that if anyone desires to receive the Holy Spirit, they must search the Lord's side, that is, meditate with thanksgiving on the love of the divine heart. By this he has predestined us from eternity to be sons and heirs of his kingdom and has continually gone before us, unworthy that we are, and come after us, ungrateful that we are, with such limitless good things. They must also touch the Lord's hands, that is, worship with thanksgiving every single redemptive work in which the Lord toiled for thirty-three years for the sake of our love, and specially in his passion and death. And when this has inflamed them with mindful thanksgiving, let them offer God their whole heart in union with that love with which he said, *As the living Father has sent me, I also send you** and so on, for every good pleasure of the divine will; so that no one will wish or desire anything

*see John 20:22

*see John 20:27

*John 20:21

at all other than the supreme good pleasure of God. Let them in addition offer to do and suffer whatsoever the Lord imposes. When someone has done this, they will undoubtedly receive the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete, with that love with which the disciples received <him> on this day through the Son of God's breathing on them. Then the Lord breathed on her and gave her, too, the Holy Spirit, saying: *Receive the Holy Spirit: whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them.** At this she said, "Lord, how can this be, since this power to bind and loose is given to priests alone?" The Lord replied, "Anyone whose case you have judged to be innocent, discerning through my Spirit, will certainly be reckoned guiltless in my sight, and anyone whose case you have determined to be guilty shall appear answerable in my sight: for I shall speak through your mouth."[1] She answered, "Since your courtesy, most merciful God, has very often sanctified me with this same gift, what do I gain from your granting me the same thing once again?" The Lord replied, "When someone is ordained as deacon and later as priest, he does not lose the office of deacon in this way but acquires greater honor from the priesthood. So too when a soul is given some gift a second time, the reiteration certainly establishes it more firmly, and through this her accumulation of blessedness is increased."

*John 20:22-23

1. Cf. I.16.1.

CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

THE GREATER LITANY ON THE FEAST OF MARK

1. On the feast of Saint Mark the Evangelist,[1] while the community was chanting the Litany in procession, the Lord Jesus appeared to her on the throne of his majesty, adorned with as many precious jewels like sparkling mirrors as there are saints that now reign with him in heaven. And when the names of the saints were invoked in the Litany, as often as a name was invoked, at once that saint rose up reverently with great joy and on devoutly bended knees before the Lord and with outstretched hands seemed to touch the jewel on the Lord's garment that symbolized him. While he was doing this, there appeared under his hands the names of all those women who were invoking his aid. And the names of those who were doing this with concentration and devotion seemed to be inscribed with golden letters. The names of those who were doing this only from habit appeared written in black letters. But the names of those who were doing this while bored and distracted appeared so dim that they could scarcely be made out. She understood from this that the appearance on the Lord's garment of the names of those invoking

1. April 25, also the date of the completely distinct solemnity of the Greater Litany.

the saints' aid signified that whenever the saints we have invoked pray for us, that prayer, like a reminder of the mercy for which we have begged, immediately shines out in the Lord, constantly reminding him and prompting him to have mercy on us. Also, whenever someone invokes one of the saints with particular love and devotion, that saint immediately receives the splendor of the jewel on the Lord's garment that symbolizes him, together with the inscription of those reverencing him with special devotion, in return for the eternal mindfulness that always prompts him to obtain salvation in this life and the next for those invoking him.

CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR

SAINT JOHN BEFORE THE LATIN GATE[1]

1. On the feast of Saint John before the Latin Gate, blessed John appeared to her and was comforting her with wonderful gentleness, saying, "Do not be downhearted, chosen spouse of my Lord, because of the failure of your physical strength; for everything that is endured in this present life is little and as if momentary* in comparison to those eternal delights that we who have already been made blessed enjoy in heaven. After a little while you too will possess them with us, having become as it were one of us when you have entered the bridal chamber of so beloved a spouse, so long awaited, summoned by so many sighs of desire, and by your prayers finally obtained." And he added, "Remember, I say, that I, *that beloved disciple whom Jesus truly loved*,* was much weaker in both physical strength and senses than

*see 2 Cor 4:17

*John 13:23; 21:7

1. This feast, abolished in 1960, was held on May 6 to celebrate the ancient tradition recorded by Tertullian that, under Domitian, Saint John the Evangelist was plunged into a cauldron of boiling oil in Rome outside the Latin Gate but emerged untouched and was then banished to Patmos (Benedictine monks of St Augustine's Abbey, Ramsgate, comp., *The Book of Saints*, 6th ed. [London: A & C Black, 1989], 317; and see *Golden Legend*, trans. Ryan, 1:51).

you when I was still alive on earth.[2] Nonetheless I now appear in the hearts of all so flourishing and lovely that it is hard to find any of the faithful who is not swayed by a special love in memory of me. Thence memory of you, too, will similarly flourish after your death in the hearts of many, and will draw the minds of very many to delight in God."

2. Then she complained to Saint John that she was afraid that she would run up against a stumbling block: she sometimes failed to confess things, minor though they might be, from forgetfulness, because from time to time she did not have an ample supply of confessors and out of weakness could not remember. Blessed John gently comforted her on this point, saying, "Do not fear, daughter; for indeed whenever you exert your entire will to confess every single one of your sins, and even though you seek a confessor there is none available, all that you fail to confess at that time from forgetfulness will shine forth in your soul in the sight of the merciful Lord like precious stones; from this you will appear wonderfully graced in the sight of all the citizens of heaven."

3. Then during Mass she was pondering with thanksgiving what she had written about those things that she had received from the Lord by the special blessing of intimacy. At the sequence, *The word of God, born of God*,[3] she was putting these aside to concentrate on those words that were being chanted to the honor of blessed John. That blessed evangelist appeared to her

2. According to the *Legenda Aurea*, Saint John lived to the age of ninety-eight (*Golden Legend*, 1:55).

3. *Verbum Dei, Deo natum*; "The word of God, born of God." Sequence for the feast of Saint John before the Latin Gate, in *Analecta Hymnica Medii Aevi*, vol. 55, ed. Clemens Blume (Leipzig: O. R. Reisland, 1922), Nr. 188; cf. also IV.4.1, n. 3.

and, as if sitting on her right, forbade her to put aside the aforesaid thoughts. In a wonderful way he brought it about that while concentrating on her writings she did not experience an obstacle but rather gained a special insight in each of the verses of the sequence.

4. While they were chanting "Within the bounds of his seat he heard,"[4] she said to blessed John, "What joy you experienced when you were elevated in such a way!" To this he replied, "You speak the truth. But you should know that I now enjoy greater pleasure from those things on which you were reflecting just now, as you rejoiced in the kindly condescension of my most loving Lord." And in this way he sat beside her like a friend, as if thinking the same thoughts, while they were singing "He, the Virgin's guardian."[5] During this verse he seemed to be elevated to the throne of glory where, gleaming with wonderful beauty, he was praised by all the heaven dwellers with inestimable love. From this he enjoyed extraordinary delights from the super-sweet words that followed, that is, "To whom <Christ entrusted> the palace of heaven"[6] and so on.

4. *Audit in gyro sedis, / Quid psallant cum citharoedis / Quater seni proceres*; "Within the bounds of his seat he heard / what the twenty-four elders / sang with harps"; see Rev 5:8; from the same sequence, referring to the author of the book of Revelation, traditionally identified with Saint John the Evangelist.

5. *Iste custos virginis / Arcanum originis / Divinae mysterium / Scribens evangelium / Mundo demonstravit*; "He, the Virgin's guardian, / showed to the world / the arcane mystery / of the divine beginning"; from the same sequence.

6. *Caeli cui palatium / Christus suum lilium / Filio tonitrui / Sub amoris mutui / Pace commendavit*; "To whom Christ entrusted / the palace of heaven, his lily, / to the son of thunder / in the peace of mutual love"; from the same sequence. The "son of thunder" refers to Saint John and "the palace of heaven" to the Virgin Mary.

CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE

PREPARATION BEFORE THE FEAST OF THE ASCENSION

1. Before the feast of the most renowned Ascension of the Lord, to greet the most saving wounds of the Lord Jesus' whole body she was reading this verse 5,466 times:[1] "Glory to you, most delightful, sweetest, kindest, noblest, imperial, most excellent, shining and ever tranquil Trinity, for the rosy wounds of my uniquely chosen lover." On one occasion the Lord appeared, beautiful in form above the countenances of angels,* having on each of his wounds flowers sparkling with golden splendor. With serene countenance he greeted her in return with most soothing speech and said, among other things, "Behold, at the hour of your death I shall appear to you, all lovely and beautiful, in this shining and glorious form in which I am displaying myself to you right now. And I shall adorn you, cloaking all the stains of your sins and negligences, with such loveliness as my wounds are now adorned from the salutations of your prayers and also of all those who with similar zeal and

*see Ps 44:3

1. Presumably considered to be the total number of Christ's wounds. Mechtild twice proposes the figure of 5,460 (LSG 1.18 and IV.56) and once 5,490 (LSG VII.8). See further John C. Hirsh, *The Boundaries of Faith: The Development and Transmission of Medieval Spirituality* (Leiden, New York, Cologne: E. J. Brill, 1996), 97–98.

devotion greet my wounds, one by one, with the same or similar prayer."

2. Now on the Sunday next before the Ascension she rose hastily to read[2] Matins so that afterward she could remain longer in prayer and caress the more freely and sweetly the Lord, whom, during the four days preceding the Ascension, she lovingly longed to entertain in her heart. She had already completed Matins as far as the fifth lection when she saw before her another sick woman who had no one with whom she could read Matins. Filled with the bowels of compassion and *moved with mercy toward her*,* <Gertrud> said to the Lord, "You well know, Lord, how much I have labored beyond my strength in reading Matins alone, because I long to entertain you, Lord of charity, during those days. You also know, alas! how little I have prepared myself during the week with zeal of prayers and exercise of virtues to offer you fit lodging. To your eternal praise, and in recompense for all that I should have prepared for you as my most amiable guest, in the charity that you are yourself,* I shall now read Matins again." And when she was beginning all over again, the Lord, authenticating those words, *I was sick, and you visited me*,* and also, *Whatever you have done for one of the least of mine, you have done for me*,* showed himself to her in the serenity of such great goodness and kindliness as cannot be expressed by any words, nor can it be grasped by human senses.

*see Luke 7:13

*1 John 4:8

*Matt 25:36

*Matt 25:40

3. But nonetheless let me say a few words, selected from many. It seemed to her that the Lord Jesus, sitting in lofty glory as if at a most delicious banquet, was dispensing to all those in heaven, on earth, and to the

2. Gertrud is sick, so not singing the Office in choir.

souls in purgatory ineffable and inestimable gifts of grace, of joy, and of eternal rewards, not only from the individual words but also from the individual letters that she was offering up in reading Matins. Also the inexplicable pleasure of divine knowledge was shining upon her at intervals, from each and every word of the psalms, readings, and responses, and powerful delight of spiritual insights was flowing into her soul to the very marrow. Because of their great number, however, although richly endowed with what she had previously tasted in the depths of her being, she could retain only a few to describe. For when in the psalm "Unto thee will I cry, O Lord,"* at that verse "Save your people, Lord, and bless your inheritance,"* she was desiring that the Lord should extend a generous gift of blessing over the universal church, the Lord replied, "What do you wish me to do, my beloved? For I have given myself so courteously into your power, just as on the gallows of the cross I completely surrendered myself to the Father. So just as then I could not come down from the cross against his wishes, so now too I am unable to will anything other than what is pleasing to your love. Therefore whatsoever you desire, distribute generously to whomsoever you like from the power of my divinity."

*Ps 27

*Ps 27:9

4. She was enjoying these delights of the divine caress, and others like them, during the whole of Matins, and when Matins was over, she had composed herself to rest on her bed. The Lord said to her with most caressing serenity, "Anyone wearied from acts of charity reposes most justifiably on the peaceful wedding bed of charity." Having said this, the Lord caught her up in his embrace and reclined on her bosom as in a most tranquil wedding bed. Then as if from the midst of the depths of his divine heart, against which she seemed to lie, there flowered the tree of charity, lovely in stature

and extremely beautiful in branch and fruit, with leaves shining like stars. Lowering its branches and spreading them out, it completely surrounded the wedding bed on which her soul was resting and through this was refreshing her soul in pleasure by the fragrance and taste of both its leaves and its fruit. It seemed, too, that from the root of the same tree was leaping forth a most pure stream as from a spring. Leaping high and immediately returning to its source, it was refreshing that blessed soul with extraordinary sweetness. From this she understood that this stream prefigured the sweetness of the most excellent divine nature whose fullness resided physically in the human nature of Jesus Christ, which delights the souls of the chosen with incomprehensible sweetness.

5. Then during Mass, at which she was to receive communion, she showed God every failing of her soul, as one friend to another whom he knows to be likely to help and who abounds in all good things. She prayed that on the most delicious day of his ascension he would win from God the Father the correction of all her inadequacies and failings. To this the Lord gave her this soothing reply: "You are that lovable Esther, for you are graced in my sight with incredible beauty; therefore ask what you wish, and it shall be given you."* Then she began to pray for those entrusted to her and also for all those who were bestowing any benefits on her. Then the Lord, gently leaning toward her and covering her as if with his own cloak,* secretly pressed a kiss on her forehead. From this she immediately realized that on the previous day she had acquired a blemish because through human weakness she had accepted a service rendered her by someone.

*see Esth 5:2-3

*see Ruth 3:9

6. She said to the Lord, "Ah, my lord, why do you allow someone to respect or reverence me like that, when you, the Lord of all, wished to be the least of

men on earth? You find it worthy of supreme praise that your chosen should be despised and undervalued in this world because they are consequently made the more equal to you in glory as they are counted the more contemptible on earth." The Lord replied, "I have spoken through the prophet, *Shout with joy to God, all the earth*, and further on, *give glory to his praise*.* Some people, I say, who perceive this more powerfully in spirit, put you first in their affection and look on you more kindly, and I sanctify them and fit them for my grace, and make them very welcome." To this she replied, "Then, Lord, if you sanctify those people through this, how does it happen that I acquire a defect through this?" The Lord replied, "I delight to enamel your golden jewelry, that is, the grace that I have set in you, with dark color and bright." Then she understood that *dark* symbolized that when someone remembers having accepted through human weakness the rendering of some service and thence, sorrowing, is humbled, through such humility she is greatly pleasing to God, just as the color black renders gold more distinct. But by the fact that the Lord also said *bright color* she recognized that that gratitude with which, for God's sake, someone receives services rendered them both by God and by human beings greatly fits the soul to receive and treasure all divine gifts.

*Ps 65:1

7. On the Monday she was intent on showing the Lord, with this devotion mentioned before, all her sins and failings, and had once more in charity got up before Matins for that sick woman mentioned earlier, and was ministering to her beyond her capacity. She offered this, too, to the Lord to his eternal praise for the correction of all sins in the whole world that cross his divine will. While she was doing this, it seemed to her that she was encircling a boundless multitude of both men and women with a golden cord that symbolized charity, and

was leading them to the Lord. Then the merciful and kindly Lord, illuminated with wonderful gentleness, was welcoming her, just as a king welcomes a beloved prince, if he brings all his adversaries as prisoners of war to make peace with him, and from thenceforward to serve him as he wishes.

8. On the Tuesday during Mass while she was showing the Lord in a similar way the weakness and imperfection of all the righteous, she prayed that he would deign to perfect them in all holiness in the way most pleasing to himself. With outstretched hand the Lord blessed them, making the sign of the victorious cross on all alike. This saving blessing sprinkled sweetest dew on the hearts of all the righteous, from which they all seemed to blossom again, as roses and other flowers bloom in the brightness of the sun.

9. Then on the Wednesday once again at the elevation of the Host she was beseeching the Lord in the same way for the souls of all the faithful departed, that he would deign to relieve their miseries through the joy of his delightful ascension. She saw the Lord send down a golden staff, as it were, into the midst of purgatory, which had as many hooks as the loving thoughts aimed at him for the souls. And by means of each hook certain souls were pulled out from the place of punishment to the lovely fields of peace. She understood by this that whenever a prayer is said in charity for all souls, then a large number of those who, when alive, had labored in works of charity are freed.

10. Then greeting the Lord on behalf of all her limbs she was reading this verse 225 times: "Hail, Jesus, beautiful bridegroom, in the triumphant shout with which you ascended,* I greet and praise you." It seemed that each little verse was being presented to the Lord in the form of some melodious musical instrument that pleased

*Ps 46:6

the Lord, and was praising and playing before him just as minstrels are accustomed to play at the banquet of nobles, and the Lord showed himself very glad to accept this. She also recognized that those little verses that she had read with devout concentration gave the Lord the sweetest harmony, but those that she had read carelessly sounded more melancholy and subdued.

CHAPTER THIRTY-SIX

THE SOLEMN DAY OF THE LORD'S ASCENSION

1. On the solemn day of the surpassingly joyful Ascension, she paid close attention early in the morning to how she might caress the Lord in sweetest manner at the hour of his ascension, that is, around None. The Lord responded, "Whatever caress you wished to give me at the hour of the sublime ascension, give it all to me now, for the most delightful joys of my ascension take on new life through my coming to you in the life-giving sacrament of the altar." Then she said, "Ah, teach me, my one and only lover, how I can take part in a procession most precious to you, in reverence for that most renowned procession in which, when about to return to the Father, you *led them out as far as Bethany*."* The Lord replied, "Since Bethany is interpreted as 'house of obedience,'[1] if someone leads me into their innermost being, that is, offers me their whole will and, by carefully considering where they have fulfilled their own rather than my divine will and by worthily repenting for this, determines from then onward to seek, desire, and fulfill my will, that person takes part in a procession that is most pleasing to me in all things and most precious."

*Luke 24:50

1. A traditional interpretation, deriving from Origen, *Homilies on Luke* 37 and *Commentary on John* 6:24.

2. And when the Body of the Lord was being brought to her to receive communion, the Lord said to her, "Look, now I come to you as my bride, not so much to bid you farewell, but rather to carry you up with me and present you to God the Father." In these words she understood that when the Lord comes to the soul through the sacrament of his Body and Blood, he attracts its desire and good will and in this way exhibits to God the Father the likeness of the soul in himself, just as wax impressed by a seal shows <the seal's> image in itself, and by pleasing him with this, gains the benefit of graces. Then she offered the Lord her short prayers and also those of certain other people that they had rendered to the Son of God, as if in place of the varied jewels on his wounds and his most holy limbs with which he shone, to the glory of his own most excellent ascension. Then the Lord Jesus appeared, most nobly adorned by all these, and stood before God the Father. She saw the Lord, the heavenly Father, attract with the almighty power of his divinity all the jewels that had been offered his Only Begotten from the good will of the chosen. He then reflected back from them a marvelous splendor to the thrones of glory prepared from eternity for those who had rendered him those same prayers, which will glorify them magnificently when after this exile they reach the Kingdom.

3. At the hour of None, while she was intent on the Lord at that hour about to ascend to the heavens with glory, the Lord Jesus appeared to her again, *beautiful above the sons of men*,* dressed in a green tunic and a pink cloak. The green tunic signified the greenness of all virtues, whose highest perfection blossoms in the most holy humanity of Christ. The pink cloak symbolized that most powerful love that had provoked the Lord to endurance in suffering such great pains, as if he could have had no merit other than what he had obtained through

*Ps 44:3

the endurance of his passion. Marked out by these garments, the King of glory, Lord of hosts,[2] accompanied by an infinite multitude of angels, processed through the choir. Gently embracing each member of the community who had received communion that day with his holy right arm, he imprinted a sweet kiss on the mouth of each with these words: "Behold, I shall be with you to the end of the world."* *Matt 28:20

4. He seemed also to offer some people a golden ring distinguished by a most precious stone, saying, *I shall not abandon you as orphans, I shall come to you again*.[3] Astonished at seeing this, she said to the Lord, "Why, most loving Lord, have those women whom you have betrothed with rings in sign of special friendship deserved more than others?" The Lord replied, "Those women, I say, while eating were devoutly mindful of that courtesy with which I ate and drank with my disciples before the ascension.* So the stone of their ring shines with as many virtues as each of them took mouthfuls while mindful of that prayer, 'May the power of your divine love wholly incorporate me into you, most kindly Jesus.' " *see Luke 24:41-43

5. Now while they were chanting the antiphon *With raised hands*,[4] the Lord, raised up by his own divine

2. *O rex gloriae, domine virtutum, qui triumphator hodie super omnes caelos ascendisti, ne derelinquas nos orphanos sed mitte promissum patris in nos spiritum veritatis, alleluia*; "O King of glory, Lord of hosts, who on this day as conqueror ascended above all the heavens, do not leave us as orphans but send us the Father's promise, the spirit of truth, alleluia"; antiphon for the *Magnificat* at the second Vespers of the Ascension; see Ps 23:10.

3. Response at Matins of the Ascension, John 14:18.

4. *Elevatis manibus ferebatur in caelum et benedixit eis, alleluia*; "With raised hands he was carried up to heaven and blessed them, alleluia"; antiphon for Lauds (and sometimes Vespers) of the Ascension.

power and accompanied by a multitude of angels reverently serving him, blessed the assembled community with the sign of the cross as if from above in the air, saying, *My peace I give you, my peace I leave with you*.* From this she understood that through that blessing the Lord had so powerfully imparted his divine peace to the hearts of all those celebrating the day of his ascension with special devotion that they should never, from thence forward, be so distracted by troubles that no trace of this peace would remain in their hearts, as a spark of fire <always> lies hidden under the ash.

*John 14:27

CHAPTER THIRTY-SEVEN

PREPARATION FOR THE FEAST OF PENTECOST

1. When the solemn feast of Pentecost was at hand, as she was about to receive communion on the preceding Sunday, she was praying that the Lord would fittingly prepare her for the reception of the Holy Spirit with these four specific virtues: purity of heart, humility, tranquility, and concord. While she was praying for purity of heart she immediately realized that her own heart had become as white as snow. And when she was praying for the virtue of humility, she saw the Lord laying a foundation in her soul to receive his gifts. Then, while she was praying for the gift of tranquility, the Lord seemed to surround her heart with a golden circle against the attacks of enemies. Then she said to the Lord, "Alas, my Lord, I am afraid that this defensive wall of tranquility will be too quickly broken down, because when I see anything that is opposed to you I do not know how to turn a blind eye and not speak in opposition to it." To this the Lord replied, "The good of tranquility is not disturbed at all through such an emotion, but rather is wonderfully enhanced as if by various slits[1] through

1. The metaphor is of a defensive wall (*munimentum*) with slits (*cancellis*) through which flaming arrows of unquenchable fire (*inextinguibilis ardor*) could be shot.

which the unquenchable fire of the Holy Spirit refreshes the soul more effectively with its sweet breath."

2. Then while she was praying for loving concord, the Lord strongly fortified <her>, protecting with that virtue, as with a cloak, the other gifts of the Holy Spirit in her soul so that they might be kept safe. And since she was once again afraid that she would lose this cloak of concord through her rather harsh attacks on certain women opposed to the religious life, the Lord replied, "The virtue of concord is not disturbed through rebellion against unrighteousness. On the contrary: I place myself in the cracks in a heart disturbed by my zeal, and thus I strengthen it more securely and keep safe the indwelling and workings of my divine Spirit." And she understood that anyone who devoutly begs the Lord to prepare her with the virtues just mentioned for the reception of the Holy Spirit, and is eager to make progress in them, will certainly obtain a similar result.

CHAPTER THIRTY-EIGHT

THE HONEY-SWEET FEAST OF PENTECOST

1. On the most holy vigil, while she was devoutly praying during the Office to be prepared for the coming of the Holy Spirit, she heard in spirit the Lord saying to her with the most delightful tenderness, *You shall receive the power of the Holy Spirit coming upon you.** While she experienced wonderful delight at the Lord's words, she also began dejectedly to ponder her unworthiness. Then it seemed to her that through her recollection of her unworthiness he was making, as it were, a hollow place in her heart, and the more worthless she considered herself, the deeper it became. Then from the heart of the Son of God, flowing with honey, was dropping down a most pure source[1] of sweetness in the form of a honeycomb, which little by little was dripping into the hollow of her heart, until it filled it up to the top. This she perceived symbolized the delight of the Spirit, the Paraclete, who flows delightfully into the hearts of the chosen through the heart of the Son of God. Then with his divine hand the Son of God blessed the fullness of the hollow as if it were a baptismal font, so that whenever her soul entered into it, it was purified from every spot and rendered acceptable.

*Acts 1:8

1. *vena*.

2. While she rejoiced at having been endowed with this saving grace of blessing, she said to the Lord, "Look, my Lord, I an unworthy sinner confess with sorrow—alas!—that from human weakness I have sinned again and again against your divine omnipotence, and through ignorance have sinned in many different ways against your divine wisdom, and in many ways have wickedly tried your inestimable kindliness. Therefore, *Father of mercies*,* have mercy on me and from your omnipotence give me the strength to withstand all that is opposed to you, and from your unsearchable wisdom allow me sedulously to prevent everything in me that could offend the eyes of your purity, and from the overabundance of your loving-kindness may I cling to you with such firm faith that I may never be at odds with your will even in the smallest way."

*2 Cor 1:3

3. And while she was saying these words, through them she seemed to be immersed in the hollow, as if about to be reborn. When she emerged after a while, she appeared without any spot of sin, as if *whiter than snow*.* And standing like this before the sight of the divine majesty, she entrusted herself to the protection of all the saints, just as the baptized are customarily entrusted to their godparents, desiring and beseeching them all to pray for them. Then all the saints, rising up with joy, offered the Lord their own merits in recompense for all her negligences and deficiencies. When she had been wonderfully adorned by this, the Lord kindly caught her up and placed her straight in front of him so that his divine breath delightfully breathed on her soul, and in return he powerfully inhaled the breath of her soul. And the Lord said to her, "These are *my delights*, in which I delight *to be with the children of men*."* For the breath of her soul signified her good will, and the breathing of the Lord the condescension of

*Ps 50:9

*Prov 8:31

the divine loving-kindness, by which he condescended to accept the good will of her soul. And in this way the soul, sweetly resting in expectation amid the Lord's embraces, should be the more suitably prepared for the reception of the Holy Spirit.

4. Now she was eager to win from the Lord with special prayers the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit, and was praying first for the gift of fear, by which she might be restrained from all evil. The Lord appeared to her there as if planting a tree of elegant height in the midst of her heart, which she saw spreading its branches to protect the entire dwelling place of her heart. It had thorns turned to one side from which the most beautiful flowers were growing straight upward. Then she understood that the tree symbolized the holy fear of the Lord, which pierces the soul as if with thorns and restrains it from all evil. But the flowers symbolized that will with which a person longs to be protected from every sin by the fear of the Lord. In addition, when a person accomplishes some good work through the fear of the Lord or rejects evil in this way, then that tree produces most beautiful fruit. Similarly, when she was praying devoutly for the individual gifts of the Lord, the individual gifts appeared in the beautiful form of lovely trees, each one producing its own flowers according to its own characteristics.* From the trees of knowledge and loving-kindness there seemed to drip down most gentle dew. She understood through this that those who cultivate the virtues of knowledge and loving-kindness blossom and flourish as if sprinkled with most delightful dew. From the trees of counsel and fortitude there seemed to hang little threads of gold: this signified that through the spirit of counsel and fortitude the soul is drawn to receive spiritual things. From the trees of wisdom and understanding,

*see Gen 1:12

too, streams of nectar flowed, symbolizing that through the spirit of wisdom and understanding the sweetness of divine fruition powerfully influences and delightfully satisfies the soul.

5. Now during the holy night she experienced such great weakness at Matins that she could no longer take part. She said to the Lord, "What praise and glory, my Lord, could you have from my spending so little time at the divine Offices, unworthy as I am?" The Lord replied, "So that you may be led to spiritual understanding through comparison with outward things, consider what the bridegroom gains from caressing his bride for his heart's pleasure during the space of a single night. But no bridegroom could ever have such great joy in his bride's caresses as I have, however short the time that my chosen offer their hearts for me to delight in them."

6. When she was coming forward for communion, the Lord seemed to breathe on her soul with a most sweet breath as if from all his most holy limbs, from which she experienced a wonderful and ineffable pleasure. She recognized that she had earned this because she had eagerly prayed for the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Then having received communion, she offered to God the Father the holy life of Jesus Christ in its entirety, in recompense for having never provided, from the hour at which she had been reborn in baptism and received the Holy Spirit, a worthy home in her heart and soul for her most courteous guest. Just as an eagle seeks its prey in swift flight, the sweetest Spirit, prompted by this offering, swooped down swiftly above the life-giving sacrament *in shape as a dove*.* Seeking out and entering the sweetest heart of Jesus, he showed himself most content with the home provided by that most holy breast.

*Luke 3:22

7. Now while the hymn *Come, Holy Spirit*,[2] was being sung at Terce, the Lord Jesus appeared as if opening his heart to her with both hands, filled with all sweetness. Then, kneeling, she fell on her face, so that her head rested in the midst of the Lord's heart. The Lord, taking her head, seemed to wrap his own divine heart around it, and through this he united to himself her will, which is called "the head of the soul," and sanctified it in him. Then, during the second verse, "You who are called the Paraclete," instructed by the Lord she placed both hands on the Lord's heart and won the assistance of divine consolation in all her actions, so that from thenceforward they would all be most perfectly pleasing to the Lord. After this at the third verse, "You with your sevenfold grace," placing her feet similarly on the heart, she earned the sanctification of all her desires, which are signified by the feet. Next, during the fourth verse, "Enlighten our senses," entrusting her own senses to the Lord, she received this promise: that her senses would be so enlightened that others too would be enlightened in knowledge through her and inflamed with the love of God. At the fifth verse, "Drive far our foe," bending down to her soul the Lord most caressingly granted her a most delightful kiss; with this he powerfully repulsed the assaults of the enemy as if with a most strong shield. In these she experienced such great delight that she clearly perceived that this was what she had been rightly told on the previous day: "You shall receive the power of the Holy Spirit coming upon you."[3]

2. *Veni, Creator Spiritus*, the ninth-century hymn attributed to Rabanus Maurus. The best-known English translation, used here, is "Come Holy Ghost, our souls inspire."

3. See IV.38.1.

CHAPTER THIRTY-NINE

COMPENSATION FOR HER SPIRITUAL ATTITUDE[1]

1. On Monday, while at the elevation of the Host she was offering it as recompense for everything that she had ever neglected in her spiritual attitude, in not following the Spirit but quenching it, the same saving Host seemed to put forth most beautiful branches from its every part. The Holy Spirit, gathering them up, seemed to surround the throne of the ever-worshipful Trinity with them. From this she understood that the Host's sending out of branches symbolized that every negligence of hers would be most completely compensated through the worthiness of the sacrament. And suddenly *a voice came from the throne, saying*,* "She who causes her bridegroom to feed on these flowers of delight may approach the wedding chamber with confidence." In these words she understood that through the offering of that sacrament the Lord condescended to accept her as if she were perfect in spiritual attitude.

*Rev 21:3

2. Then in her usual way she was praying at the first *Agnus Dei* for the whole church, that the Lord would guide it like a father in all things. At the second *Agnus Dei* she was praying for the souls of all the faithful departed, that the Lord would mercifully relieve them

1. *spiritualis habitus*.

from their pains. During the third *Agnus Dei* she was desiring that the Lord would increase the rewards of all the saints and of the chosen who were now reigning with him in Heaven. At these words, that is, "grant us your peace," the Lord gently leaned toward her and pressed on her mouth a kiss so powerful that from it all the saints, touched to the very marrow by the power of that sweetness and sweetly transfixed, received a vast increase of all joys and rewards.

3. Next, when she was going to communion, all the saints rose up with joy. All their merits, illuminated with the flash of divine brightness, shone wonderfully, just as the golden shields of soldiers glitter, lit up by the rays of the sun.* From that splendor the merits of each and every one of the saints projected a lovely reflection onto her soul. She stood thus before the Lord in anticipation, and was not yet admitted to intimate union with him, but at length when she had received the life-giving sacrament her soul was united to her lover with complete enjoyment, insofar as is possible in this life. And in this way the branches mentioned earlier, with which the Holy Spirit had surrounded the throne of the most blessed Trinity, swiftly began to green up and flower again, just as a dry plant flowers again at a shower of healthy rain. And the holy and ever-tranquil Trinity, receiving inestimable pleasure from this, distributed to all the saints the delights of new joy.

*see 1 Macc 6:39

CHAPTER FORTY

THE GRACE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

1. Then on the Tuesday she was offering the Host, the Body of the Lord, in recompense for having never been properly grateful for the special grace of union and intimacy with which the Lord drew her, rather than many others, to him in spirit. Nor had she freed herself from all outer things to be available to him and to concentrate on him, as would have been right. She did this with such fidelity that she desired perpetually to suffer the poverty of her own negligences in herself so as to compensate the Lord for whatever glory and honor she had taken away from him through her negligences. The kindly Lord, who accepts a person's good intention for the deed, seemed to perfect her every desire through that Host in a most perfect way. Then the most kindly Spirit, gathering all that perfection into itself, came down with it to her soul and through the same sacred Host indissolubly bonded itself to that blessed soul, as if with a most powerful glue.

CHAPTER FORTY-ONE

THE FEAST OF THE GLORIOUS TRINITY

1. On the solemn feast of the shining and ever-tranquil Trinity, she had recited in its honor this little verse, "Glory to you, imperial, most excellent, most glorious, most noble, most sweet, most kindly and ever-tranquil and ineffable Trinity, one equal Godhead, before all ages, now and forever,"[1] and was offering it to the Lord. The Son appeared in his human nature, in which he is said to be less than the Father,[2] standing before the worshipful Trinity, in the graceful springtime of most flourishing youth, having on each of his limbs a flower of such great beauty and splendor that it could not be compared to any visible, material thing. This symbolized that, since our puny human nature could by no means, even with difficulty, approach the unattainable praise of the most excellent Trinity, Christ Jesus in his human nature, in which he is said to be less than the

1. Expanded version of *Gloria tibi, trinitas aequalis, una deitas et ante omnia saecula et nunc et in perpetuum*; "Glory to you, equal Trinity, one God, before all ages, now, and forever"; antiphon for Lauds and Vespers on the feast of the Trinity.

2. The Athanasian Creed declares that Christ is *aequalis Patri secundum divinitatem: minor Patre secundum humanitatem*, "equal to the Father as to his divine nature; less than the Father as to his human nature."

Father, has adopted our poor efforts and by ennobling them in himself has made them a worthy burnt offering to the supreme and undivided Trinity.

2. Now while they were intoning Vespers, the Son of God, holding in both hands his most kind and worthy heart, was presenting it to the sight of the glorious Trinity in the form of a stringed instrument.[3] Through it every devotion and all the words that were being sung during that whole feast were resounding most sweetly. The singing of those who were chanting the psalms without any special devotion, just from habit or human delight, was murmuring in the background like the thick strings in the bass. But those who were concentrating on singing the praise of the worshipful Trinity with devotion were sounding through the most holy heart of Jesus as if in the higher register with a clear tone and most delightful sound. Then while the antiphon *Let him kiss me** was being sung, *a voice came from the throne saying,** "Let *my beloved Son* approach, *in whom I am most pleased** in all things, and let him offer a surpassingly sweet kiss to my delight." Then the Son of God, stepping forward in human form, offered a most sweet kiss to his incomprehensible divine nature, to which his most holy human nature alone, in an inseparable bond of union, deserved to be most blessedly united.

*Song 1:1[4]
*Rev 19:5
*Matt 3:17
Matt 17:5

3. After this, the Son of God said most gently to his virginal mother, in whose honor that same antiphon was being chanted,[5] "You, too, come near, my sweetest

3. *cithara*, possibly a lyre or harp; however, the verb used to describe the playing of the instrument (*volvere*, to turn) suggests the organistrum, which was played by turning a handle. See Introduction, ix–xxii.

4. Not one of antiphons for Trinity Sunday but used at various feasts of the Virgin.

5. See previous note.

mother, and receive a sweet kiss from me." And when the Lord Jesus had imprinted a most sweet kiss on his most blessed mother with most serene gentleness, the glorious Virgin was seen there wonderfully adorned on every one of her limbs with the beauty of those same flowers with which the Lord condescended to appear, made lovely with the prayers offered him. And the Son of God conferred this honor on his mother because he had taken from her the human form, whose most holy limbs appeared made beautiful by the offerings of our devotions and prayers, feeble though they might be. <Gertrud> also understood that, as often as the person of the Son was named on that feast, that most loving Son caressed God the Father in an ineffable and inconceivable way, and by that caress the human nature of Jesus Christ was made bright in a wonderful way, and from that brightness of Christ's human nature all the saints received fresh knowledge of the incomprehensible Trinity.

4. Now during Matins, while the antiphon *Rightly <do all creatures> praise, <adore, and glorify> you*[6] was being sung at Lauds, with all her strength she was joining in praising the ever-worshipful Trinity through that same antiphon. This was her intention: if it were possible for her to chant that very antiphon in her death-agony with such devotion that she would lose her life by exhausting all her strength in praise of God, she would most willingly do so. It seemed to her that the whole Trinity, shining and ever tranquil, was bending with most kindly condescension toward the heart of Jesus, which in the form of a stringed instrument was

6. *Te jure laudant, te adorant, te glorificant omnes creaturae tuae, o beata trinitas*; "Rightly do all creatures praise, adore, and glorify you, O blessed Trinity"; fifth antiphon for Lauds on the feast of the Trinity.

playing wonderfully and sounding sweetly before the most holy Trinity. On it <the Trinity> put three strings that, in accordance with the insuperable omnipotence of God the Father and the wisdom of God the Son and the benevolence of the Holy Spirit, should unceasingly make good every failing of hers to the pleasure of the most blessed Trinity.

5. And when she had completed the whole of Matins with devout intention, she began to consider whether she had accidentally lost merit through some carelessness, as she had not received such excellent insights as usual from those things on which she was concentrating with as great a devotion as she usually gave to Matins. She was divinely instructed on this by these words: "Weighed in the balance of justice,[7] you have been deprived of inner delight of spiritual understanding because, in yielding to your own will, you took human pleasure in the harmonious sound of the chant, but you should know that your future reward will be increased in that you preferred toil in my service rather than comfort."

6. But if, before or since, the divine generosity granted her any spiritual grace or consolation on this most glorious feast that was especially dear to her, there are no words with which they could be presented to human understanding. Let us therefore render for them, as for others known only to God, the praise and thanksgiving especially mentioned during the church's services on that day.[8]

7. Cf. II.20.1.

8. As in the response for Matins, *Tibi laus, tibi gloria, tibi gratiarum actio in saecula sempiterna, o beata trinitas*, "Praise and glory to you and thanksgiving forever and ever, O blessed Trinity."

CHAPTER FORTY-TWO

SAINT JOHN THE BAPTIST

1. On Saint John the Baptist's day,[1] while she was taking part in Matins as devoutly as she could, that same blessed John appeared to her, standing before the throne of glory of the King of Heaven, wonderfully lovely, in the flower of most vernal youth, and shining gloriously with the special privileges of his special worth: that he had been worthy to baptize Christ and go before him and point him out, and so on. While contemplating him she recalled that he had been represented quite differently in a picture, for he was painted as an old man and contemptible in every way. Blessed John taught her that this very fact did not prevent the increase of his glory. The picture quite reasonably showed him to be extremely old, since it was his constant intention to struggle faithfully in all things for the love of God against unrighteousness, *unto old age and grey hairs** and the consumption of all his strength and faculties, and to concentrate on supreme perfection all his life. As he concluded his life in such will and deed, he is recompensed with such rewards. But when she asked if his reward was also increased because he had righteous and honorable parents, he replied, "Because I had righteous parents and hence was nurtured the more for

*Ps 70:18

1. June 24.

righteousness, I am raised up the more, like a throne that is raised up on carefully constructed pillars. But in that they were honorable as the world reckons—handsome or rich or well-born—I am not for that reason the more exalted, except insofar as, despising those things, I raised myself toward heavenly things. For I gain so much the more glory from this as a soldier, returning victorious from battle, rejoices the more the greater the number of enemy traps he knows he has avoided."

2. Now at Mass, while the community was receiving communion, blessed John the Baptist appeared again, beautifully attired in rosy garments that were ornamented with as many golden lambs[2] as those throughout the whole church who had received the Lord's Body in commemoration of his feast day. Also the same Baptist seemed to pray for all who were taking part in his veneration, and to win this favor: that at his intercession they were granted that merit that the forerunner himself had gained with faithful toil, because he always took scrupulous care to *turn the hearts** of the people to God.

*Luke 1:16-17

2. The lamb is an important attribute of Saint John the Baptist in medieval art.

CHAPTER FORTY-THREE

SAINT LEO THE POPE

1. The feast of Saint Leo the Pope had fallen on a Sunday,[1] and constant in prayer, she was devoutly admiring that same venerable pontiff in his truly wonderful glory, mindful that she had read that he had cut off his own hand to vanquish temptation.[2] She was joining in praising the Lord intently for the steadfast victory with which he had made him triumph so gloriously, while praying that he would condescend through <the saint's> merits to grant to a certain person that in all temptations she should triumph to the praise of God and her own profit. Then Saint Leo taught her that she should instruct that person for whom she was praying that whenever she approached a place or an activity in

1. The SCh edition assumes that this must refer to April 11, the feast of Saint Leo the Great (ca. 400–461), further arguing that the year must be 1288, the only year between Gertrud's conversion in 1281 and her death in 1301 in which this feast fell on a Sunday that was not also Palm Sunday (which would take precedence). However, given the position of this chapter in the largely chronological sequence of book 4, it is more likely that "Saint Leo the Pope" refers to Saint Leo II (d. 683), whose feast day fell on June 28.

2. This apocryphal story is found in the *Legenda Aurea*, but attached there to Saint Leo the Great, who was said to have cut off his hand because when a woman kissed it he had experienced sexual temptation (*Golden Legend*, trans. Ryan, 1:339).

which she feared there might be a chance of temptation, she should always say the verse "*Let my heart* and my body *be undefiled*."* After she had completed the activity she should join in praising the Lord for those things from which he had protected her, for no one falls so seriously that they could not have fallen even more seriously and dangerously, if God's mercy had not looked out for them. But in whatever she might feel she had stumbled a little, as recompense she should offer God the Father the most innocent passion and death of Jesus Christ. He added that if she did this, God would never allow her to stumble in any way that might incur the damnation of her soul.

*Ps 118:80

2. Then, while she was coming forward for communion, she perceived that Saint Leo was with her and was devoutly beseeching the Lord that through the reception of that same sacrament she might deserve to experience the same pleasure of the divine in-flowing that the holy pope himself had experienced at that Mass when he first celebrated the liturgy after having recovered his amputated hand through the virginal mother. At the intervention of his prayers, when the Lord had courteously shared the abundance of the divine loving-kindness with her, he also granted her every reward with which that same most blessed pope shone in heaven, raised up for such worshipful victory over temptation. And the kindly Lord did this because, out of the humility for which she was particularly remarkable and knowing that untested virtue appears the less glorious in heaven, she was always afraid that she would fail to receive the reward of chastity, since because of the extreme purity of her heart the Lord had never allowed her to be assailed by carnal temptations. She herself, however, attributed this to her own weakness: she reckoned that the Lord had mercifully protected her

from carnal temptations as he knew in advance that she was so weak and unreliable that if she were to suffer such attacks she would more likely succumb than resist. And in this way the Lord made good from the merits of this saint this failing that she lamented. In addition, the Lord gave her every reward that that person for whom she had prayed would receive if she bravely overcame temptations according to her instruction. From this too she perceived that whenever someone thanks God for a victory or some benefit bestowed on another, or gives someone profitable instruction, that person immediately wins the reward of both.

CHAPTER FORTY-FOUR

THE HOLY APOSTLES PETER AND PAUL

1. On the glorious feast of the princes of the apostles, Peter and Paul,[1] while at Matins the second response, *If you love me, <feed my sheep>*,[2] was being sung, she asked the Lord what sheep she could feed, so that she could prove to him her supreme love in action. The Lord replied, "Feed for me five lambkins that I have chosen with the greatest tenderness: that is, feed your heart with divine meditations, your mouth with saving words, your eyes with holy readings, your ears with useful advice, your hands with constant work. As often as you are eager to concentrate on any one of these, I shall always take it as a manifestation of supreme love." She understood that divine meditations of her heart meant everything that could be thought to God's praise and her own profit and the salvation of her neighbor; similarly, saving words and holy readings, everything that it is profitable to see, such as the representation of Christ crucified, the need of the sick, and the examples of the righteous. By useful advice she understood feeding her ears healthily to the Lord's pleasure, with endurance of criticisms. As for constant work of her hands, while she

1. June 29.
2. *Si diligis me, Simon Petre, pasce oves meas*; see John 21:17.

was thinking that this could not be done at the same time as reading, she perceived that the Lord accepts in place of work eagerness for or intention of reading, or even holding a book in one's hands, and similar activities.

2. After this, while she was praising and extolling blessed Peter during Mass for his special privileges and, among others, that he had heard the Lord say, *Whatsoever you shall bind*,* and so on, that same apostle appeared to her in papal glory, dressed in sacred vestments. Stretching out his hand above her, he blessed her to carry out in her soul all the work of salvation that he had ever been able to do in any soul from the power bestowed on him by those words. Now when she was coming forward to receive the Lord's Body and was trembling, mindful of her own unworthiness, the two princes already mentioned seemed to approach her, one from the right and the other from the left, conducting her with great glory. And when she had arrived the Son of God rose up and embraced her with both arms, saying: "Look! I too conducted you with the same arms with which I receive you; but I preferred to carry this out through my apostles, so that from this your devotion toward them would be increased." Then, admitting her guilt in that she had not extolled blessed Paul with special devotion because he had slipped her mind, she prayed the Lord that he would himself condescend to make good her neglect.

*Matt 16:19

3. Now after the reception of the sacrament, when she had devoted herself to prayer, she appeared with the Lord as a queen sitting with the king on his throne, and the oft-mentioned princes were kneeling before both of them as if they were knights receiving their recompense from their lord and lady. For the saints' reward seemed to have been increased by the virtue of her communion. Astonished because the apostles

could <surely> possess quite sufficient reward in that they themselves frequently offered the same sacrifice on earth, she was instructed by this comparison: although a queen has sufficient honor because she is united with the king, nonetheless she takes great pride and pleasure in her daughter at her wedding feast. In this way all the saints rejoice with the soul that receives the sacrament of the altar with devotion.

CHAPTER FORTY-FIVE

SAINT MARGARET THE VIRGIN

1. On the feast of the illustrious virgin, the most blessed Margaret,[1] while she was concentrating on her devotion during Vespers, that same glorious virgin appeared, all flourishing and vigorous in the springtime of unfading eternity and wonderfully adorned with incomparably glorious ornaments, standing before the throne of divine majesty. And while they were intoning the response, *The worshipful virgin*,[2] the King of glory, the Lord Jesus, appeared to send out most brilliant splendor, from the most chaste purity of his own most innocent and virginal human nature. With this he illuminated the virginal beauty of blessed Margaret, as if to renew and redouble in her soul the merit of her chaste virginity, just as if a painter had drawn a picture beautifully enhanced with varnish to make it gleam the more. At those words, *standing in great constancy*, the Son of God, for the increase of glory and heaping up of the merits of his bride's suffering, once more sent out wonderful splendor from the incomparable glory of his own most innocent and most bitter passion into the soul of that same virgin, which made her ineffably beautiful. Next, while they were chanting the phrase in

1. July 20.

2. *Virgo veneranda, in magna stans constantia, verba contempsit judicis, nil cogitans de rebus lubricis*; "The worshipful virgin, standing in great constancy, despised the words of the judge, thinking nothing of lewd things"; response for the feast of Saint Margaret.

the hymn, *granting rewards to his brides*,[3] the Lord spoke to blessed Margaret his bride as if caressing her and said, "Young woman, have I not sufficiently increased the rewards of your merits, even though I am now being urged to grant you rewards?" And thus lovingly caressing her, the Lord attracted the devotion of everyone celebrating the feast of blessed Margaret throughout the whole world, and from that he honorably exalted blessed Margaret the glorious virgin with inestimable rewards of merits.

2. Then blessed Margaret turned to her and said, "Rejoice and be glad, specially chosen of my Lord, for assuredly after a little while in which you are weighed down by various sickness and troubles in this world, you shall rejoice forever in eternal glory. There in return for each and every moment of physical weariness you will be allotted a thousand thousand years of heavenly consolations by your bridegroom and lover, who has sent you all that you undergo in heart or body out of special love for you. Thence in an ineffable way, day by day and moment by moment, you are being sanctified and similarly fitted for eternal blessedness. Consider," she said, "that on that day on which I received this glory in which now I rejoice, I was not honored as now I am glorified by the whole world, but rather I was despised and considered completely wretched by all. So have faith that you too, after a blessed end to this life, will doubtless revel endlessly in the joyous embraces of your immortal bridegroom in the glory of those super-celestial delights *that eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor has it entered into the human heart, the things that God has prepared for them that love him*."*

*1 Cor 2:9; Isa 64:4

3. *sponsisque reddens praemia* (translated by J. M. Neale as "Adorning all Thy chosen brides / With glorious gifts") from stanza 2 of *Jesu corona virginum*, Office hymn for the Common of Virgins.

CHAPTER FORTY-SIX

SAINT MARY MAGDALENE

1. On the feast of the most blessed Mary Magdalene, lover of Christ Jesus, during first Vespers Christ's most worshipful beloved appeared adorned with as many golden flowers, inconceivably bright, and as many precious stones as the stains of the sins by which she had once been disfigured. Standing on the right hand of the Son of God, the saint seemed miraculously to illuminate the whole of heaven, her native land, with the splendor of her glory. Lord Jesus, holding her affectionately by the chin,[1] caressed her with most charming words. From this <Gertrud> was divinely instructed that the golden flowers symbolized the loving-kindness of the mercy by which he had so mercifully forgiven her sins, and the precious stones the suitable penance with which she had expunged the stains of her sins with the help of God's grace.

2. Now during Matins, while she was devoutly concentrating, to God's praise, on the words and notes that were being sung in honor of blessed Mary Magdalene, she was praying the saint to intercede both for her and also for those entrusted to her. <The saint> came forward and flung herself at the Lord's feet, sweetly kissing them, and after lifting them up with her own

1. See IV.2.12, n. 10.

hands she offered them through her own merits to all who desired to approach them in true penitence. Then <Gertrud> approached devoutly and tenderly kissed those same most holy feet, saying, "Now look! my most loving Lord, I offer you the troubles of your servants who have been entrusted to me, and with them I wash your most blessed feet." To this the Lord replied, "You have washed my feet on their behalf most excellently and properly; now say to those for whom you pray that they too should wipe them with their own hair, kiss them, and anoint them with ointment."[2] In these words she understood three things to which they should pay particular attention. First, as if wiping the Lord's feet with their hair, they should carefully consider and weigh up whether they found anything in their troubles that was opposed to God or separating them from God. In this they should direct their intention to God in such a way that they would willingly expose themselves to whatever adversities had to be endured for their correction. Second, for kisses bestowed on the same most holy feet, they should have full and confident trust in God's most faithful loving-kindness, that he would forgive them with the greatest ease for all the sins of which they repented unconditionally. Third, for precious ointments, that with their entire will they should decide voluntarily to avoid as far as possible everything that is opposed to God.

3. And the Lord added, "If it is your pleasure to offer me that *precious ointment* that we read this same devout woman *poured over my head*,* having broken the alabaster box, from which *the house is filled with the odor of the precious ointment*,* know that you will

*Matt 26:7

*John 12:3

2. See Luke 7:38, 44, 46.

possess it the more properly by loving truth. For anyone who, loving the truth, from time to time loses friends in its defense, or incurs other troubles, or is voluntarily involved in toil, has indeed broken the alabaster box of precious ointment and poured it over my head, from which the house is filled with sweet odor. For people become a good example when those who are eager to correct others themselves become the more purified from vices* through showing greater vigilance against those vices that they have corrected in others. And in this way they become a sweet odor in every place while they both correct themselves and edify others by their own example. Indeed if someone, loving the truth, falls short in some things in its defense, by correcting some people with rather harsh words, impelled by zeal, or in some other way acting either negligently or indiscreetly, I shall indeed faithfully defend them before God the Father and all the citizens of heaven, just as I defended Mary <Magdalene>[3]—or rather, I shall make all things right on her behalf." *RB 2.40

4. She said, "Lord, since it is said that Mary <Magdalene> purchased this precious ointment, how could I render you such a great service, as if I had purchased you something similar?" The Lord replied, "If anyone offers me her good will in anything that she decides to do for love of me, however much she must toil to promote my praise, she truly purchases a most precious ointment and one most acceptable to me. In putting my honor before her own convenience she voluntarily exposes herself to all kinds of inconveniences, even if she is prevented from ever putting her intention into effect."

3. See John 12:7.

CHAPTER FORTY-SEVEN

SAINT JAMES THE APOSTLE

1. On the feast of the glorious apostle blessed James the Great,[1] that same apostle appeared to her, most honorably adorned with the merits of all the pilgrims who venerated the relics of his holy body.[2] Greatly surprised at this, she asked the Lord why he had exalted him above the other apostles with such honor, so that people from such distant countries flock to his worshipful relics with more devout eagerness than to the tombs of the prince-apostles Peter and Paul or of the other apostles and saints. The Lord replied, "I have raised up this my beloved apostle with this special privilege among the others because of the burning zeal with which, from love for me, he was spurred on to the salvation of souls. But by the decree of my eternal providence he was removed so quickly from the body[3] that he was not able to convert so great a throng of people to the faith as he wished to do, to my praise. His good intention, therefore, ever young and alive in my sight and pleasing to me in all things, gained this reward, so that what he had failed

1. July 25.

2. The remains of Saint James were enshrined in the cathedral at Compostela in Spain, one of the great Western European pilgrimage sites in the Middle Ages.

3. Saint James was the first of the apostles to be martyred; see Acts 12:2.

to accomplish in life, having been overtaken by death, is now after his death made good forever through the fact that signs and miracles multiply at his tomb, and so many people are both absolved from their sins and also by making devout pilgrimages are strengthened in the catholic faith."

2. Then <Gertrud> too, desiring to be absolved from her own sins through the merits of the same apostle, determined that instead of making a pilgrimage she would receive the sacrament of the Lord in <the saint's> honor on that same day. When she had done so, it seemed to her that she was sitting with the Lord at a table lavishly furnished with varied dishes. And when she had offered the Lord the Body of Christ that she had received to the eternal praise and increase of the apostle's blessedness and glory, that same apostle immediately came in the form of a distinguished prince and reverently sat down at that table before the Lord, giving immense thanks for so magnificent an offering offered him through the sacrament of Christ's Body. Then, because she had offered this most noble sacrament in his honor, he devoutly prayed the Lord that through his merits he would graciously perform in her soul all the effects of salvation that he could perform, and deigned to perform, in anyone.

CHAPTER FORTY-EIGHT

THE ASSUMPTION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN

1. The feast of the sweet-flowing Assumption of the spotless Virgin was close, and <Gertrud> was again confined to bed. She could not, as she wished to do, recite completely in honor of the most blessed Virgin as many Hail Marys as the number of years she had lived on earth.[1] Nonetheless she was trying devoutly to make up the number by means of these phrases: *Hail Mary*, *full of grace*, *the Lord is with you*. And while she was devoutly offering this, together with various prayers with which others had entrusted her to offer to the most blessed Virgin, the gracious Virgin appeared to her wrapped in a shining green cloak, scattered all over with golden flowers like trefoils. She said, "Look! Each of the women on whose behalf you are offering to me has placed on me as many flowers to embellish it as words uttered in prayer. Each of the flowers blossoms more or less, depending on how strongly she was intent on her prayer. And I reflect the splendor of those flowers onto the souls of each and every person who rendered them to me, so that they could please my Son and the whole host of heaven."

1. Traditions vary: fifty-nine, sixty-three, and sixty-six years are common.

2. The blessed Virgin also seemed to have six-petalled roses, mingled with the trefoils just mentioned, that shone very brightly. Three of their petals seemed to be of gold, wonderfully embellished with various jewels. But the three other petals that were interspersed among them seemed to be marked out by a variety of colors beyond human comprehension. From this she understood that the three gold petals symbolized those three phrases that she had recited with difficulty in her sickness. Out of his goodness the Lord had added the three other indescribable colors of the three other petals: one for the desire she had had to greet and praise his sweetest mother, the second for the discretion with which, when she felt that she was not strong enough, she recited only three phrases, and the third for the total trust with which she had been sure that both the Lord and his kindly mother would accept what she had had the strength to perform.

3. Then during Prime, after which Mass of the vigil of the Assumption was to be sung, she was beseeching the Lord from her heart's most profound love that he would condescend to win her grace and favor with his sweetest mother, to whom, so it seemed to her, she had herself never shown the service that was due. The Lord, bending down with the greatest gentleness to the dearest embraces of his mother, showed all the filial love for her that had ever swayed him. He said, "Remember, lady, most loving mother, that I am merciful to sinners for your sake, and look upon this my chosen one with such love as if she had served you to your satisfaction with supreme devotion all the days of her life." At this the virginal mother, as if completely melted and dissolved into honeyed sweetness, seemed to bestow herself completely on this woman with all her blessedness for love of her son.

4. Next during the Mass "<All the rich among the people shall entreat> your countenance,"[2] while the collect, "God, who <deigned to choose to dwell> in the virginal palace <of blessed Mary>,"[3] was being recited, the Lord Jesus demonstrated such great and inconceivable gentleness and friendliness to his most blessed mother, as if summoning once again at that moment in many different ways all the joys that she had had in his most holy conception, birth, and other delights of his human life. And when <Gertrud> was concentrating devoutly on those words, that is, "that safe in her protection we may assist with joy"[4] and so on, the tender mother seemed kindly to open her cloak as if to receive all those taking refuge with her under her special protection.[5] Then the holy angels approached, bringing with them into her presence all those who had devoutly prepared themselves for that same feast with special devotion or with prayers. They appeared like beautiful young women who, sitting reverently before her as daughters before their mother, were supported on all sides by the service of the holy angels, defended from the assaults of evil spirits, and brought to all kinds of good things. And she perceived that such angelic protection was won by the words of the collect mentioned before, that is, "that safe

2. *Vultum tuum deprecabuntur omnes divites plebis; filiae regum in honore tuo*; "All the rich among the people shall entreat your countenance; the daughters of kings <have delighted> in your glory"; introit for the vigil of the feast of the Assumption; see Ps 44:13 and 10.

3. *Deus, qui virginalem aulam beatae Mariae in qua habitares, eligere dignatus es*; collect for the feast.

4. Conclusion of the collect.

5. This reflects the standard medieval iconography of the Virgin as Mother of Mercy ("Mater misericordiae"); see also IV.48.5.

in her protection," for at her command the host of angels protect and defend on every side all who call upon her.

5. After this, various kinds of little animals seemed to run under her cloak. These symbolized sinners who have a special devotion to her. Kindly receiving them all and protecting them with her cloak, the Mother of Mercy touched and stroked every single one with her delicate hand and caressed them lovingly as someone pats a dog. Through this she clearly intimated how mercifully she receives all those who call on her and how she defends them with motherly loving-kindness and protects those still in the thrall of sin who hope in her, until she may reconcile them as true penitents to her son. Indeed, at the elevation of the saving Host, the Lord Jesus seemed to offer himself with every blessedness of his divine and human natures in the form of the sacramental Host to all those who were devoutly participating in the Mass in honor of his sweetest mother, desiring to serve her devotedly on the feast of her Assumption. As a result, sweetly allured and delightfully refreshed by the vital force of divine power, they were all strengthened in their own good intentions, just as someone is refreshed and strengthened by food made from various kinds of spices and seasonings.

6. Then after Mass, while the community was processing to chapter in accordance with the statutes of the Order, she saw the Lord Jesus with an infinite multitude of angels awaiting the arrival of the convent with great joy. Astonished at this, she said to the Lord, "Why, my beloved Lord, have you come with such great courtesy and so great a multitude of angels to this chapter, at which we do not perform any special devotion as we do on the vigil of your most holy Nativity and incarnation?"[6] The

6. See IV.2.8–11.

Lord replied, "I have come here like the father of a family kindly welcoming the guests invited to his banquet. Today in reverence for my sweetest mother, at the proclamation of the solemnity of her most high Assumption I shall welcome with special love all those who desire to celebrate devoutly this same feast. And moreover I shall absolve by my divine authority all those who with humility and devotion confess their neglect of the Rule." And the Lord added, "I take part in your chapter in the same way on all feast days and, moreover, I accept everything that you do there in the way that I showed you before on the vigil of the Nativity."

7. Then while she was concentrating with special devotion on None, at which according to our statutes the feast of the Assumption begins, divinely illuminated she perceived that on the day before her most happy assumption, around the hour of None the most blessed Virgin Mary was so completely absorbed into God that, divested of all that is human, she was already being invigorated by the Spirit of God in a foretaste of heavenly delights. This lasted until that most joyful hour at which, around the third hour of the night, supremely prepared in all perfection of virtues for the Lord's coming, she went to meet him with great joy, with a completely clear conscience. And thus flying into his arms she was made *one spirit* with him* and *entered into the powers** of the full blessedness of his divinity.

*see 1 Cor 6:17

*Ps 70:16

8. During Vespers, while the psalms were being chanted, the Lord seemed to draw to his divine heart all the praises offered him in the psalms, and to direct from his heart toward the blessed Virgin torrents, as it were, that flowed most vigorously. From these the Virgin, glorious mother, received as many floods as she had been endowed with dignities of merits. And while they

were intoning the antiphon *You are all fair*,[7] <Gertrud> rushed into the Lord's embraces and was striving to make resound every single word through the musical instrument of his heart, in memory of those sweetest caresses with which, through those words or ones like them, she believed the Son of the Most High caressed his most blessed mother. And suddenly out of such devotion the torrents from that divine heart overflowed with great force and flooded the Virgin's soul so lavishly that because of the excessive force the flows seemed to leap upward, shining with wonderful brightness as if they were real stars. Surrounding the Queen of Heaven on every side, they bedecked her with indescribable beauty and made her joyful. Now because there were so many <torrents>, some seemed to fall to the ground; all the saints, gathering them up, and offering them to the Lord with joy, took pleasure in admiring them in a way beyond description. This symbolized that all the saints draw generous draughts of joy, glory, and unfailing blessedness from the superabundance of the dignities and merits of the most blessed Virgin. And thus all the angels, joining with the community's devotion in such a shout of joy, were making sweetly resound with one harmonious voice the response, "Who is she <that comes forth like the sun>?"[8] When this was finished, the Son of God intoned in a loud voice the verse, "She

7. *Tota pulchra es amica mea et macula non est in te*; "You are all fair, my love, and there is no spot in you"; opening of the antiphon at Vespers of the feast of the Assumption; see Song 4:7-11.

8. *Quae est ista quae processit sicut sol, et formosa tamquam Jerusalem? Viderunt eam filiae Sion et beatam dixerunt et reginae laudaverunt eam*; "Who is she that comes forth like the sun and lovely as Jerusalem? The daughters of Sion saw her and declared her blessed and queens have praised her"; response at Vespers of the feast of the Assumption; see Song 6:8-9.

is lovely."[9] The Holy Spirit seemed to play[10] the stringed instrument of his divine heart to the praise and glory of the blessed Virgin Mary above all creatures. During the hymn <*The God*> *whom earth* <*and sky and sea / Adore*>,[11] the blessed Virgin, as if no longer having the strength to support *flowing delights*,* leaned on the breast of her most loving son and rested in the joyful shout of heavenly delights until the verse "O glorious Lady."[12] Then, prompted by the devotion of the faithful, she stood upright and extended to them all the hand of her kindly protection and motherly consolation. Rising up at that verse, <*Glory be*> *to God the Father,* she seemed to make three genuflections with the greatest reverence to the honor and glory of the ever-worshipful Trinity. Thus she remained during the *Magnificat*, praying for the church. But at the antiphon *Most wise virgin*,[13] she sent down a heavenly light to all those who were devoutly calling upon her.

*see Song 8:5

9. Another time, on the same glorious feast of the Assumption, her strength completely failing, <Gertrud>

9. *Ista est speciosa inter filias Jerusalem sicut vidistis eam plenam caritate et dilectione in cubilibus et in hortis aromatum*; "She is beautiful among the daughters of Jerusalem, just as you have seen her full of love and charity in our rooms and in our fragrant gardens." See Song 4:16, 5:1, and 6:1. See also PL 78:798B.

10. *circumvolere*; see IV.12.7, n. 9.

11. *Quem terra, pontus, aethera*, as translated by J. M. Neale.

12. *O gloriosa Domina*, opening of the second part of *Quem terra, pontus, aethera.*

13. *Virgo prudentissima, quo progrederis quasi aurora valde rutilans? Filia Sion tota formosa et suavis, es pulchra ut luna, electa ut sol*; "Most wise virgin, where are you going, shining like the dawn? Daughter of Sion, all lovely and sweet, you are beautiful as the moon, bright as the sun"; antiphon for the *Magnificat* at the second Vespers of the feast of the Assumption; see Song 6:9.

was helped with difficulty to the place of prayer to hear Matins and sat down there exhausted. In due course the Lord, "the dayspring from on high," visited her "in the
Luke 1:78 bowels of his loving-kindness." He appeared to her during the sixth response, as if he were present in spirit at that most joyful festival on which the virginal Mother of God, having paid the debt of the flesh,[14] sought the heavenly realms. Therefore from the sixth response already mentioned, that is, "Above health <and all beauty,>"[15] until the end of the *Te Deum*, when she came to herself, in everything that was chanted she received a special insight of wonderful delight. Let me expound a few from among many, as far as they can be expounded to others' understanding. For that response, "Above health," seemed to be chanted by the combined forces of angels and apostles, rejoicing with their lady for such unique privilege of rewards. During this the glorious Virgin, drawn by inconceivable delight, left the confines of her body and was welcomed into the sweetest
*see Ps 67:6 embraces of her son. The kindest *father of orphans*,* taking on the role of his beloved bride, the church, and as if wishing to entrust <Gertrud's> neediness, so deeply hidden in his heart, to <the Virgin's> maternal tenderness as well, intoned on her behalf the seventh response, "Saint beloved to God." Then, as if preparing to process, the same son, swayed by tender love toward his mother,

14. That is, having died (see Rom 8:12); there is no doubt that Gertrud believed that the Virgin underwent bodily death before her assumption.

15. *Super salutem et omnem pulchritudinem dilecta es a domino, et regina caelorum vocari digna es; gaudent chori angelorum consortes et concives tui*; "Above health and all beauty you are beloved by the Lord, and you are worthy to be called the Queen of Heaven; choirs of angels rejoice with you as your companions and fellow-citizens"; see Wis 7:10.

seemed also to extol her with more frequent praise. And so he greeted her with the eighth response, "Hail Mary." Following him the company of saints added, "Hail, merciful mother of Christians."[16] Then Jesus, in the person of his bride the church, followed on, adding in a clear voice, "Virgin, consolation <of the desolate>,"[17] and so on.

10. Next when at the canticle,[18] *Hear me, you divine offspring,** the blessed Virgin seemed to enter heaven with indescribable jubilation, all the court of heaven seemed so moved at the unparalleled nature of such great exultation that human language could not describe it. For she appeared to enter a meadow, most delightful beyond all human comprehension, full of all kinds of flowers. Then when that verse was being chanted, "And bring forth leaves in grace"[19] and so on, to welcome their one and only queen, all the flowers sent out from each and every petal a specially delightful splendor and pleasure of sweetest scent, and in addition a bright and joyful sound, as if one could hear all the world's musicians chanting sweetest melody together. Then the blessed

*Sir 39:17

16. *Salve Maria, gemma pudicitiae, de qua mundo illuxit sol justitiae; salve pia mater christianorum; succurre filiis ad filium regem angelorum*; "Hail Mary, jewel of chastity, from whom the sun of righteousness illumined the world; hail, gentle mother of Christians; bring assistance to your sons before your son the king of angels."

17. *Virgo solamen desolatorum, spes et mater benigna orphanorum*; "Virgin, consolation of the desolate, hope and kindly mother of orphans."

18. Sir 39:17-21 was sung as a canticle at Matins on feasts of the Virgin and the Common of Virgins; see James Mearn, *The Canticles of the Christian Church Eastern and Western in Early and Medieval Times* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1914), 92.

19. Sir 39:19.

Virgin, as if exulting in her unmatched blessedness and rejoicing with God, sang, "I shall greatly rejoice in the Lord."[20] Then God the Father, as if well pleased with the many-faceted perfection of the graceful Virgin, blessed the church on earth with abundant sweetness, saying, "You shall no more be called forsaken"[21] and so on.

11. After this, in praise of the virgin mother the whole choir of angels burst out, singing loudly, "There are three score queens," indicating that the Virgin Mary was raised up above their ranks. Then the choir of the saints added, "And four score concubines," also proclaiming that the Virgin Mary was privileged above them. Then both choirs, that is of angels and saints, representing the church on earth, chanted, "And young maidens without number," through this too extolling the Mother of God above themselves, as is most fitting. Then the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete, added with sweetest melody, "One is my dove," as if to say, "I have found this woman uniquely like me, in whom I could be pleased to rest." Then the Son of God said, "My perfect one," as if to say, "Everything that I hoped to find in both my human and divine nature have I found most perfectly in her." To this God the Father added, "She is the only one of her mother, the chosen of her that bore her";[22] as if unwilling from excess of love to conceal

20. Another canticle, Isa 61:10; see Mearn, *Canticles*, 92.

21. A third canticle, Isa 62:4-8; see Mearn, *Canticles*, 92.

22. *Sexaginta sunt reginae et octoginta concubinae, et adolescentularum non est numerus; una est columba mea, perfecta mea, una est matris sua, electa genetrici suae*; "There are sixty queens, and eighty concubines, and young maidens without number. One is my dove, my perfect one is but one, she is the only one of her mother, the chosen of her that bore her"; antiphon for Lauds of the octave of the feast of the Assumption, see Song 6:7-8.

what he himself felt for her, he revealed that she is the chosen of her mother, that is, of the church.

12. Then with the melodious praise of the whole court of heaven, at the response "Hail, noble <rod of Jesse>,"[23] she was set on the throne of glory on the right hand of the Son with fitting honor. And after this all the citizens of heaven, fittingly united before the throne of the kingdom, with an outpouring of most abundant acclamation extolling her praiseworthy life, were chanting with indescribable jubilation the response, "You are blessed, Virgin Mary."[24] To this the whole Trinity added the verse, "Hail Mary," renewing in her the sweetness of that angelic greeting that was the most saving prologue to all its work of salvation. Again the choir of saints added, "Behold, you are raised up,"[25] praying that she should intercede for the church on earth. After this God the Father, delighting to extol her with more specific praise because she was completely pleasing to him in her beauty, was chanting resonantly the response, "Hail, bride." To this the Son added: "Sunamite <bride>, after the heart of the supreme King," and the Spirit added, "Hail, mother Mary." The Son added, "the Holy Spirit bearing witness." Then all the company of the saints

23. *Salve nobilis virga Jesse, salve flos campi Maria, ex te ortum est lilium convallium*; "Hail Mary, noble rod of Jesse, flower of the field, from you is sprung the lily of the valleys"; response for the feast of the Assumption; see Isa 11:1 and Song 2:1.

24. *Beata es virgo Maria, dei genetrix, quae credidisti domino, perfecta sunt in te quae dicta sunt tibi a domino; ecce exaltata es super choros angelorum; intercede pro nobis ad dominum deum nostrum*; "Blessed are you, O Virgin Mary, Mother of God, who trusted in the Lord, all has been fulfilled in you that was said to you: behold, you have been raised up above the choirs of angels. Pray for us to the Lord our God"; see Luke 1:45.

25. *Ecce, exaltata es <sancta dei>.*

added, "You once <saved> Mary, made loathsome by a thousand Egyptian vices."[26] Then the choir of angels rejoined, "You reconciled the despairing apostate Theophilus[27] to your son and to grace."[28] Then all the saints at once in the name of the church on earth knelt before the blessed Virgin and sang, "O lofty, O holy"[29] and so on. After this, the whole Trinity, bursting out of the profound superabundance of favorable joy and as if moved to astonishment, was chanting most clearly the twelfth response, "Who is this?"[30] making known to all the merits of the blessed Virgin.

13. Then finally she perceived that in return for her beatification the blessed Virgin herself was chanting with all the court and host of heaven, *We praise you, God*,[31] to the glory of the ever-worshipful Trinity. The first verse, therefore, extolled the whole Trinity all at once; the second verse, "You, the eternal Father," particularly extolled God the Father; the third, "To you all angels <cry aloud>," the Son of God; the fourth, "To you the cherubim," the Holy Spirit. And in this way she perceived that each Person was extolled by a particular verse, with the exception of those seven verses, "You are

26. Saint Mary the Egyptian, former courtesan and prostitute.

27. Saint Theophilus the Penitent, who traditionally made a pact with the devil but repented: the Virgin appeared to him and returned the pact, which was then torn up and publicly burnt.

28. *Ave sponsa Sunamitis secundum cor summi regis; ave virgo mater, spiritu sancto teste; tu olim Mariam sordidis Aegypti milies exosam, tu Theophilum desperatum apostatam reconciliasti filio tuo in gratiam*; response for Matins of the feast of the Assumption.

29. *O sancta, o celsa, o benedicta, mitiga et nobis iram filii tui judicis*; "O holy, O lofty, O blessed, assuage the anger of your son the judge." Verse for Matins of the feast of the Assumption.

30. See IV.48.8 and n. 8.

31. The canticle *Te deum laudamus*, sung at Matins.

the King of glory, Christ" and so on, which specifically refer to the Son of God, praising him for each of the blessed Virgin's affections[32] because, with his help, she always directed them to divine praise and never diverted them to transitory things. But the following verses, that is, "Make <them to be numbered with your saints in glory> everlasting," once again extolled each Person in turn. Through all this, such insight was granted her that each verse attributed to the Father was so peculiarly appropriate to him that it could not possibly seem to be otherwise. It was the same with those attributed to the Son and also to the Holy Spirit. After this, when she returned to herself, she also sensed that her body was so refreshed by this most joyful solemnity in which she had participated in spirit with wonderful delight that she outstripped all those who were helping to bring her back so quickly that she was completely unaware of any weakness. And this good health lasted until she was refreshed with food after the solemnities of Mass.

14. Three years later, when she was once again sick and confined to bed, she was eager to apply her mind to devotion on the holy vigil of the Assumption of the glorious Virgin Mary, early in the morning at first light. She saw in spirit, as if in a most delightful garden with flowers of varied colors and pleasantly planted with fragrant springtide beauty, the most blessed Virgin now entering her death agony in most tranquil joy of sweetest contemplation; by the serenity of her most lovable countenance and benign bearing she showed herself full of grace. In the garden there appeared most beautiful roses without thorns, dazzlingly white lilies, fragrant violets, and other flowers of every kind but no weeds.

32. *affectiones*: see IV.2.6, n. 6, on the seven "affections" of the soul.

Also, wonderful to relate, the further each flower was from the Virgin, the greater seemed to be its beauty, fragrance, and vigor. As if breathing in the scent from each, one by one, with inconceivable heavenly desire the noble Virgin breathed in completely the virtue of each flower. Inhaling with inconceivable pleasure, she was eagerly exhaling the same virtue into the heart of her most loving son, which seemed to be opened toward her.

15. There also appeared a countless multitude of angels between the blessed Virgin's mouth and the flowers that she inhaled; they were detailed to serve so great an empress while they joined in praising the Lord. <Gertrud> saw there too blessed John the Evangelist,[33] devoutly prostrate in prayer by the Virgin's head. From him, too, the mother of the Lord seemed to breathe in a sort of wonderful exhalation. Although <Gertrud> certainly took very great delight in all this, she also began to wonder what it meant. Then the Lord taught her that the garden shown earlier symbolized the Virgin's intact body; the flowers the various virtues with which the most blessed Virgin was fittingly adorned; the roses, which seemed further away than the others and more beautiful, and cultivated with greater reverence by the souls of the blessed, signified acts of charity toward both God and her neighbor. The more eager <the Virgin> was to spread them abroad, the more worthy the fruit she brought to God. The lilies that were sending out a more powerful scent and more lovely whiteness signified the superiority of her holy way of life, which the chosen imitate. From the fact that the Virgin seemed to breathe in an exhalation from the heart of blessed

33. On Gertrud and Saint John the Evangelist; see IV.4 and IV.16.

John, she understood that, on blessed John's behalf, the royal Virgin had imparted a special glory for each good deed to which throughout her life she was the more free to devote herself, thanks to his foresight. And when <Gertrud> asked what benefit blessed John had from such good deeds, the Lord replied, "My heart is the more sweetly inclined to him by as many degrees of love as my mother possesses virtues that I perceived were assisted by his loving care." Then she understood that the figure of the blessed Virgin seen in the garden symbolized the precious soul of the glorious Virgin. Her soul wonderfully delighting in the fruit of each of her virtues, as if drawing it into itself from the body with the greatest thankfulness, she poured it all into God. And so throughout that day <the Virgin> seemed to lie in such joy, until <Gertrud> again fell into ecstasy during the first response at Matins and saw that mother, most blessed above all creation, leaning on the breast of her beloved son in that same most tranquil repose. With inconceivable delight the Son poured back again from his own sweetest heart all the fruit of the virtues that she had earlier directed at him in thanksgiving, so much the more worthy as it had been ennobled in his divine heart. He was surrounding her with flowers of roses and lilies of the valley, which made her indescribably beautiful with gracious springtide loveliness. God the Father Almighty himself seemed to lead that first response with sweetest song, saying, "I have seen <her beautiful>" and so on, as if making known to the citizens of heaven through those words how he himself knew her on earth, as "a dove" without stain through innocence, "ascending above the brooks of waters" through desire, "whose indescribable perfume" of sanctity was "in her garments," that is, in her way of life, and "like the days of the spring, flowers of roses and lilies of the valley,"

that is, various virtues, "surrounded her."[34] Then the Holy Spirit, adding the second response in the name of the blessed Virgin and explaining the dignity of her most holy life, was sweetly singing, "Like a cedar."[35]

16. Then all the saints, quickened by the impulse of such great praise, were chanting in wonder the third response, "Who is she?"[36] At each word the sick woman invariably received a unique insight; but through weakness she could not remember it. And so all the saints, solemnly gathering together in reverend procession before the virginal throne of the glorious mother, extolled her in sweetest harmony with the fourth response, "Rejoice, O Queen," because she was that "all-powerful queen through whom the brightness of eternal light was already shining" upon them.[37] They praised her

34. *Vidi speciosam sicut columbam ascendentem desuper rivos aquarum, cujus inaestimabilis odor erat nimis in vestimentis ejus, et sicut dies verni circumdabant eam flores rosarum et lilia convallium*; "I have seen her beautiful as a dove ascending above brooks of waters, whose indescribable perfume is in her garments, and like the days of the spring, flowers of roses and lilies of the valley surrounded her"; response for Matins of the feast of the Assumption; see Song 5:12 and 4:11.

35. *Sicut cedrus exaltata sum in Libano et sicut cypressus in monte Sion quasi myrrha electa dedi suavitatem odoris*; "I was exalted like a cedar in Lebanon and as a cypress on Mount Sion; like choicest myrrh I yielded a sweet odor"; response at Matins for the feast of the Assumption; see Sir 24:17 and 20.

36. *Quae est ista quae processit sicut sol et formosa tamquam Jerusalem? Viderunt eam filiae Sion et beatam dixerunt et reginae laudaverunt eam*; "Who is she that has come forth as the sun, and fair as Jerusalem? The daughters of Sion saw her, and declared her most blessed, and the queens praised her"; see Song 6:8-9.

37. *Gaude, regina prepotens, / eterna luce prenitens*; "Rejoice, all-powerful queen, / shining forth with eternal light." *Analecta Hymnica Medii Aevi*, vol. 24, ed. C. Blume and G. M. Dreves (Leipzig: R. Reisland, 1886), 44–46.

because she was about to become worthy ruler not only of earth but also of heaven, because she was indeed the most lovely of all virgins in every beauty of virtues and perfection of graces. In the fullness of mercy she comes to the aid of all with her maternal loving-kindness and is their everlasting glory, while the joy of all the saints is increased by her merits. Then, reverently processing, the choirs of angels made resound the verse "Make us joyful"[38] and so on with clear voices, as if with those words summoning her to the glory of her death. After this, all the saints made resound, "Glory be to the Father," for every grace received by the blessed Virgin in both body and soul. Then the inhabitants of heaven sang together all the antiphons and the subsequent psalms to the glory of God and the Virgin Mary, and granted wonderful insight. Then during the fifth response the noble Virgin herself rose up with the greatest gratitude in a joyful shout of praise and thanksgiving and was sweetly chanting these words: "All generations shall call me blessed."[39]

17. And in this way that most holy soul, inconceivably blessed above all creation, released from the flesh, amid the embraces of her spouse, leaning most gently on the arms of her son, was plunged into the very fount of all blessedness in an incomparably happy union, never to come out of it. Then all the court of heaven was made bright and joyful by the most welcome presence of so super-excellent a queen; gazing upon the soul of the

38. *Fac nos lætari faciemque tuam speculari plenam virtutis et dulcedinis*; "Make us rejoice and see your face, full of virtue and sweetness."

39. *Beatam me dicent omnes generationes, quia fecit mihi dominus magna, quia potens est et sanctum nomen*; "All generations shall call me blessed. Because he that is mighty has done great things to me, and holy is his name"; see Luke 1:48-49.

tiny little Virgin enfolded with such intimate audacity in the joyous embraces of the King and exalted above all the choirs of angels and saints and placed next to the ever-worshipful Trinity, they rejoiced together with a wonderful dance of jubilation and burst out in her praise with the sixth response, "Above health <and beauty>."[40] And thus that vision disappeared.

18. From what has been written earlier, it is very clear with what care kindly God intended the gifts of grace that he generously bestowed on one person to further the salvation of many more. For on this occasion he completed the vision where he had begun three years before, so that when our own negligence hinders a spiritual insight, we are able to gather from it at least some flowers of devotion.

19. Another time on the same feast, while she was devoutly taking part in Matins, she divided the three nocturns into three particular devotions. In the first nocturn with every word and every note she was reminding the glorious Virgin of those indescribable consolations that we believe she received, both from her Son and also from the saints, as she awaited her most blessed passing. From this, at every single word with which <Gertrud> and any other of the faithful in the whole world were reminding her of the aforesaid consolations, that spotless Virgin seemed to be surrounded by flowers of roses and lilies of the valley.* In the second nocturn she was reminding <the Virgin> of those sweetest delights that she enjoyed in her passing from this world to the heavenly palace, *leaning* delicately *upon her beloved*.* The illustrious Virgin was made beautiful with as many ornaments as words with which throughout the whole

*see Sir 50:8

*Song 8:5

40. See n. 15 above.

world she was reminded of those same delights. In the third nocturn she was reminding the Queen of Heaven of that indescribable glory, far transcending all human capacity, with which she was received on her entrance into her kingdom and raised up above all dignity of heaven. At each of these words she was vouchsafed countless splendors and sweetest savors, such as are inhaled through the fragrance of varied perfumes.

20. During Mass, while they were reading three times, *Praise the Lord, all you nations*,* at the first, in her usual manner she was praying all the saints that on her behalf they should offer their worthy merits to God, whom she, worthily prepared by those <merits>, was approaching to receive the life-giving sacrament. At the second "Praise" she was similarly praying the blessed Virgin, and at the third the Lord Jesus. The blessed Virgin, rising up at her invocation, stood before the shining and ever-tranquil Trinity, offering on her behalf those most pleasing and worthy merits by which she was herself prepared on the day of her assumption above all human, or rather angelic, dignity and by which she was supremely pleasing to him. Then with the greatest gentleness, as if leaving that place, she made a sign to <Gertrud's> soul, saying, "Come, beloved, and stand there in every perfection of the virtues with which I caused the ever-worshipful Trinity to bend its gaze on me and find me pleasing, so that you too, insofar as it is possible, may be similarly pleasing to the most blessed Trinity." Astonished at these words, she replied with the greatest abjection, "With what merits, queen of glory, could I do this?" "There are three things that will make you fit for this. First that you should pray, by that most innocent purity with which I prepared a pleasing resting-place for the Son of God in my virginal womb, to be purified from every stain through me. Second, you will

*Ps 116:1

pray, by that deepest humility for which I deserved to be 'exalted above all the choirs of angels and saints,'[41] that all your negligences may be made good. Third, by that incalculable love that unites me inseparably to God, beg that you may be granted abundance of varied merits." While she was devoutly doing this, suddenly she was transported in spirit to the height of glory granted her so courteously by the merits of the empress of heaven. And when she thus appeared to the Lord with great honor by the prerogative of her merits as if in <the Virgin's> place, the lord of majesty was well pleased in her beyond what can be said. Also all the angels and saints, coming forward, presumed to show her reverence.

21. Then, while the community was going up to communion, the queen of glory stood on the right hand of whoever was going up, covering her with a part of her cloak[42] decorated with the flowers of the prayers she had offered,[43] saying, "Look on this woman, sweetest Son, in honor of my memory." The Lord, wonderfully pleased at her request, gently and lovingly holding each woman's chin,[44] offered her the saving Host. And when <Gertrud> too had received communion in the same way, she offered the Lord the sacrament to his eternal praise, for the increase of the joy, glory, and blessedness of the most blessed mother, in recompense for the offering of her merits by which she had relieved her poverty. The Lord Jesus, as if holding out a present to his sweetest mother, said, "Look, mother, I am restoring

41. *Exaltata es sancta dei genetrix super choros angelorum ad caelestia regna*; antiphon at Matins for the feast of the Assumption.

42. Cf. paras. 4–5 above and the imagery of the Virgin as Mother of Mercy.

43. Cf. para. 1 above.

44. See IV.2.12 and n. 10.

to you double what is yours! But I shall not take it away from this woman on whom you condescended to bestow it out of love for my love."

22. After the procession, while the community was returning to the choir and singing the antiphon *Hail Mary, Lady of the world*, because of the overwhelmingly sweet harmony of the celestial hosts it seemed to <Gertrud> as if the whole of heaven moved in a dance of new exultation. Immediately the glorious Virgin appeared, standing before the altar, facing the community on the right hand of her son, in pre-excellent glory. Now at that phrase "Hail, Queen of Heaven," all the saints, kneeling before her, reverenced her as was most fitting as mother of their Lord. At that phrase "Hail, virgin of virgins," the Virgin herself held out in her delicate and worshipful hand a pure white lily to all those present, attracting them and strengthening them to imitate the example of her most chaste virginity. And when "Through you came our redemption" was being sung, all the bowels of her maternal loving-kindness were so profoundly moved that, because of the overflowing delights of those pleasures that she experienced at the same words, unable to contain herself, she leaned upon the breast of her Son with gentle delicacy. Then at these words, "We ask that you beseech for us,"[45] she sweetly garlanded his neck with varied pleasures and caressed that Lord, the King

45. *Ave domina mundi Maria, ave caelorum regina, ave virgo virginum; per te venit redemptio nostra; . . . pro nobis, rogamus, rogita ut valeamus te videre et in aeterna tuo vivamine gaudere gloria*; "Hail Mary, lady of the world, hail Queen of Heaven, hail virgin of virgins; through you came our redemption; . . . we ask that you beseech for us that we may behold you and rejoice in eternal glory in your life"; antiphon for the feast of the Assumption.

of kings, indicating with gestures all those who were there and praying for each one.

23. And when the antiphon *Today the blessed Virgin*[46] was being chanted, enveloped in a vast cloud of glory she seemed raised up to the heavens amid the gentle embraces of her son, with all the ranks of heaven accompanying her, rejoicing and clapping. And while she was being thus raised up into heaven in glory, she seized her son's right hand and with it blessed the whole community. From this blessing there appeared above each person a golden cross, hanging from a vivid green band. <Gertrud> perceived that this signified that with vivid faith and sure confidence in the mother's mercy anyone at all could fruitfully obtain the benefit of that blessing.

46. *Hodie Maria virgo caelos ascendit: gaudete quia cum Christo regnat in eternum*; "Today the Virgin Mary ascended to heaven: rejoice that she reigns with Christ forever" ; antiphon for the second Vespers of the feast of the Assumption.

CHAPTER FORTY-NINE

SAINT BERNARD THE ABBOT[1]

1. The day before the feast of Bernard, during Mass <Gertrud> was considering the merits of that same most holy father, to whom she had a special devotion because of his special claim to honey-sweet speech. The same most devout abbot appeared in indescribable glory and, so to speak, worshipfully adorned with heavenly beauty: while she was looking at him, a single glance saw the threefold color of his garments presented with wonderful clarity. For simultaneously there gleamed in him the lily white of purest integrity of virginal innocence, with the purple sheen of most holy and perfect religious life, and the rosy glow of most burning love. These three most exquisite colors, interacting with each other in the soul of so great a father, were giving all the saints most delightful pleasure. In addition, his most holy breast, neck, and hands seemed honorably encircled by *plates of gold*,* encrusted with sparkling rose-colored jewels.

*see Exod 26:29 and 36:34

2. Now the plates of gold denoted the singular refinement of his salvific teaching. Considering it diligently in his devout heart, through the medium of his holy throat he uttered it with his consecrated mouth, and faithfully wrote it down with his holy hands for all those desiring to progress in these things toward

1. August 20.

salvation. The jewels signified those sayings that more especially exuded divine love. For those same jewels seemed to send down extremely bright rays to the innermost recesses of the divine heart and to convey special pleasures to the divine nature. Now the Lord drew to his own heart from the hearts of all creatures, both heavenly and earthly, all the profit and devotion that any of them could derive from the sayings and writings of the father mentioned above. Then in return he poured it completely back with the rays described earlier as sent down from Saint Bernard's ornaments into his own divine heart. These rays, penetrating to his heart, played[2] on it wonderfully with most charming delight as if it were a stringed instrument and made resonate the sweetest sound of his endeavors and especially of innocence and love.

3. In addition he was wearing on his head a most splendid shining crown, wonderfully multicolored, in which gleamed all the progress that the same distinguished father had desired should accrue to anyone from his writings and words for the praise of God. Then she began to recite 225 times[3] the psalm, *Praise the Lord, all people*,* in honor of that saint, giving God thanks for all his virtues and the graces conferred on him. Then immediately all that she was reciting began to gleam on the garments of the most holy father, like little badges. She saw engraved on them each of his virtues with which he had shone on earth, and these too were reflecting a splendor of similar appearance onto her soul as she gave God thanks for him.

*Ps 116

4. On that saint's feast day, while she was devoutly taking part in the Mass sung in his honor, she was

2. *circumvolvendo*.
3. Cf. IV.2.7 and n. 7, IV.23.10, and IV.35.10.

praying in particular for those entrusted to her and also for others who had a special devotion to blessed Bernard, even though they had not entrusted themselves to her prayers. Once again she saw the same worshipful father in heavenly glory: from the ornament on his holy breast emanated a miraculous splendor toward the breasts of all those who longed to obtain fervent love of God through his merits and intercession. This splendor was creating on the breast of each the appearance of a brooch of admirable workmanship, in which appeared all those acts of divine love in which blessed Bernard had ever been assiduous on earth, as if they had been performed by each of them in the same way. Greatly astonished at this, she said to the saint, "What share of salvation, glorious father, do those people possess from their beautiful appearance through your merits, even though they themselves have certainly not performed similar deeds?" To this he answered, "Does a girl who is made beautiful with others' ornaments possess any less beauty than that one who is adorned with her own, as long as they are of similar beauty and workmanship? In the same way saints' virtues obtained from saints by the devotion of the faithful are directed at them with such great love that they will themselves eternally rejoice in them and shall in some way glory in their fruit!"

5. The same brooches also seemed to be enameled with multifarious and varied brightness, according to the desire, devotion, and also knowledge with which each one was laboring, to a greater or lesser extent, to achieve God's love. In addition, on the brooches of those women who had humbly asked her to pray for them, this very fact was clearly seen, which enhanced the ornament. Although the brooches of certain other persons who greatly desired the love of God shone more greatly, nonetheless they did not have this enhancement.

This indicated that there is no deed so small that one can perform with good intent from which special profit does not follow, nor is there anything so small that one can omit it without losing one's reward.

CHAPTER FIFTY

THE WORTH OF SAINT AUGUSTINE, SAINT DOMINIC, AND SAINT FRANCIS

1. Mindful of the glorious bishop Augustine, toward whom she had always felt great affection from an early age, she also gave devout thanks to God for all the blessings performed in him. Then that same glorious bishop appeared by Saint Bernard, indisputably his equal in heavenly glory; nor had he been his inferior, either in the distinction of his most holy way of life or in the sweet flow of his most salvific teaching. This bishop, worthy in God's sight, was standing before the throne of the divine majesty, made indescribably beautiful with the glory of heavenly beauty, sending out like blessed Bernard fiery splendors from the depths of his own heart into the recesses of the divine heart. These denoted fiery speeches, especially inspiring human hearts to the love of God. From his mouth he was scattering as it were sunny rays across the breadth of heaven, symbolizing the flow of his holy teaching that he scattered so widely across the whole of the church. Above these same rays appeared wonderfully bright rainbows of an unusual light, which attracted and delighted those looking at them. While she was greatly astonished at the delightful sight of all this, blessed Bernard taught her that the rays of the most blessed bishop Augustine's speeches were shining with such a delightful rainbow, since in all his writings and

sayings the matchless doctor concentrated entirely on extolling the catholic faith. By closing off the path of error and ignorance, he longed to show all people the way of salvific faith for the praise of the Lord, who graciously recalled him from the darkness of ignorance to the light of supreme truth after many years of error. Then she said to Saint Bernard, "Holy father, did you not concentrate on the same things in your writings?" Saint Bernard replied, "In all my deeds, sayings, and writings I was propelled by the force of God's love alone. But this most renowned doctor was impelled toward the salvation of his neighbors by a powerful love for God and simultaneously by the circumstances of his own experience."

2. And then the Lord, having drawn them into his own divine heart and by that union having ennobled them beyond all human thought, poured back into <the saint's> heart all the fruits of faith and consolation, of learning, of enlightenment and love that followed from Saint Augustine's words in the hearts of those in heaven and on earth. That sweet flowing influx, flooding his soul to its innermost core and by flooding permeating it, and by permeating his heart, playing it like a stringed instrument, seemed to resonate with sweetest harmony. And just as in the heart of blessed Bernard the abbot virginal innocence and sweet love had resounded with particular sweetness, so in the heart of the most holy bishop Augustine loving penitence with the fervor of blazing love for God resounded with sweeter melody. For in the hearts of both of them there resounded such surpassingly sweet music that it was impossible to discern which affected the mind of the hearer more powerfully with pleasure. Then blessed Bernard said to her, "These, I say, are those melodies of which it is written, 'All that beloved city, dedicated to God, is full

of melody in praising' and so on,[1] for the hearts of all the saints sing constantly to the Lord sweet-sounding praises according to the variety of their virtues."

3. Then on the feast of the same most glorious pontiff, while the response, "Love <of Christ> had wounded <his heart>,"[2] was being sung at Vespers, the same famous bishop appeared standing in great glory and, as if opening with both his hands his own most holy heart, so often wounded in the love of God, he presented it to the Lord to his praise in the form of a most beautiful rose that with the marvelous fragrance of its scent was refreshing all the inhabitants of heaven with unspeakable delight. Devoutly greeting that reverend father, she prayed for all those entrusted to her and also for those who had a special devotion to the same saint. Then he seemed to beseech the Lord with most devout prayers that the hearts of all the women who longed to obtain his fervor of divine love through his merits should smell sweet, in the same way in which his heart was flowering, before the divine majesty, eternally flourishing and blossoming, to the praise and glory of the shining and ever-worshipful Trinity.

1. *Omnis illa Deo sacra / Et dilecta civitas / Plena modulis in laude / Et canoris jubilo*; "All that dedicated city / Dearly loved by God on high / In exultant jubilation / Pours perpetual melody." From the hymn *Angularis fundamentum*, the second part of *Urbs beata Jerusalem* (trans. J. M. Neale).

2. *Vulneraverat caritas Christi cor ejus et gestabat verba ejus in visceribus quasi sagittas acutas; et exempla servorum dei, quos de mortuis vivos fecerat, tamquam carbones vastatores*; "Love of Christ had wounded his heart, and he carried his words as it were sticking in his bowels like sharp arrows, and the examples of the servants of God, whom he had brought back to life, like hot burning coals"; response at Vespers for the feast of Saint Augustine; see Augustine, Conf 9.2.3.

4. Now during Matins, while she was concentrating on her devotion as far as she could, she was longing to know how God would reward the worthy bishop Augustine for never tiring, as he testifies in the book of the *Confessions*, even when still alive, "in considering with wonderful sweetness the profundity of the divine plan concerning the salvation of the human race."[3] And immediately she was shown the same venerable father in ineffable glory, and following those words of
*Isa 35:10 Isaiah, "*Everlasting joy shall be upon their heads*,"* there appeared above his head a globe, both wonderful and indescribably delightful in itself, which was whirling around on its axis[4] with infinite gradations of color, very fast and without any pause, distributing alternately at every moment new delights of spiritual joys to that most blessed bishop, furnishing all his senses with special loveliness. For the wonderful brightness of countless stars twinkling delectably, which the turning of the globe scattered unceasingly, allured his sight; this rewarded all the thoughts with which on earth he had delighted in God. Also, the revolution of the globe already described made his hearing unspeakably glad; this rewarded his keen understanding, which he had directed toward God with such great eagerness. Also, the revivifying perfume of a most gentle breeze breathed on him, rewarding him for the avid delight with which he had despised every passing delight, totally intent on God. In addition, a most sweet taste refreshed his throat, because in himself he had delighted the Lord God, who so greatly desires to take delight in the hearts of human beings because, according to the word of the
*see Prov 8:31 Wise Man, in them he established *his delights*.* Finally,

3. Conf 9.6.14.
4. *in seipso*.

the frequent turning of that globe sprinkled him with a most welcome rain, affecting his entire being with most gentle delight. This rewarded all his physical exertions, in which he had toiled with all his strength by faithfully exerting himself in sayings, writings, and clear exemplifications of all the virtues, for the praise and love of God and the profit of the church. Those wonderful pleasures granted this famous father enriched the whole court of heaven with such great abundance of joys that their overflow alone seemed more than enough for all.

5. And the Lord said to her soul, "Now consider how that beloved of mine is enlightened and sanctified by snow-white purity, welcome humility, and burning charity." She replied with astonishment, "O Lord, how can you assert that he is enlightened with snow-white purity when, although worthy of all reverence because of his most holy way of life, he nonetheless strayed from the faith for so long that he must have become stained?" The Lord replied, "Just because I allowed him to stray for so long, there now shine in him my divine dispensation with which I awaited his long-postponed conversion so patiently and mercifully, and my kindly mercy with which I recalled him so courteously, and my freely given loving-kindness with which I graced him so excellently."

6. After these words, while she was carefully contemplating the splendid attire of so great a bishop, there appeared in his garments a kind of crystalline transparency. Beneath it, just as gold shines through crystal,[5] she could see gleaming those three <qualities> already

5. Cf. IV.3.4 and n. 3, and IV.28.2.

mentioned,[6] covered with varied colors of marvelous delight.

7. Then she said to the Lord, "Can it be, my Lord, that your lover, most blessed Bernard, was not as eager as this most holy Augustine to delight in you? Although I saw his glory just now I did not see him rejoicing in similar delights." The Lord replied, "Bernard my chosen one received more than abundant recompense for everything that he deserved, but the slightness of your capacity does not allow you fully to perceive the glory of even the least of my saints; how much less that of such great saints! However, to satisfy your devout desire a little, I show you the varied rewards of some of the saints. By delighting in them you may be more fully inflamed in my love, and also you may the more plainly experience that *in my Father's house there are many mansions** and also what is said in the praise of a certain saint, 'There is not found one like him, who kept the law of the Most High.'[7] For truly none of the saints is so completely equivalent in glory to another that there is no difference in some reward."

*John 14:2

8. "Since that is so," she said, "Lord God of truth, condescend also to reveal to me, unworthy as I am, something of the rewards of those virgins beloved to me from childhood, that is, gentle Agnes and glorious Catherine." When she had been granted this, as described in their feasts,[8] she also desired to learn something about the rewards of the holy fathers Dominic and Francis,

6. That is, the divine attributes enumerated at the end of the previous paragraph.

7. *Non est inventus similis illi qui conservaret legem Excelsi*; antiphon at Lauds for the Common of a Confessor; see Sir 44:20.

8. See IV.8 (Saint Agnes) and IV.57 (Saint Catherine).

who had stood out as leaders of religious orders, by whose efforts the church of God began to flower once again. Those venerable fathers appeared in dazzling glory, like glorious father Benedict in their rewards,[9] in the loveliness of blossoming roses and the beauty of a flashing scepter. In return for the efforts of their teaching, in which they were insistent in their preaching to the praise of God for the profit of souls, there appeared in them the same rewards as those of the most blessed fathers Augustine and Bernard, because they had been eager to practice the same virtues in this life. There was, however, this difference: the rewards of blessed father Francis gleamed particularly adorned by his extreme humility, but the rewards of glorious father Dominic shone most greatly, raised up by burning desires.

9. Now during Mass, while she was concentrating with all the devotion that she could on God and on those words that were being sung, while the sequence was being intoned she was again caught up in spirit and carried before the throne of divine majesty. Then to the memory of those spiritual delights and in reverence for them, whose enjoyment had gladdened her during that night in contemplation of the glory of the great bishop Augustine and of the others mentioned, all the saints were sweetly chanting to her soul the first six verses of the sequence, that is, "Our tuneful strains let us upraise / That endless feast's delights to praise,"[10] and the five subsequent verses. From each and every one of these

9. See IV.11.

10. *Interni festi gaudia / Nostra sonet harmonia*; sequence for the feast of Saint Augustine attributed to Adam of St. Victor, Digby S. Wrangham, trans., *Liturgical Poetry of Adam of St. Victor from the Text of Gautier*, 2 vols. (London: Kegan, Paul, Trench, 1891), 2:187–91.

words her soul enjoyed wonderful understanding and delight. But when the sixth verse was finished, all the saints fell silent, indicating to her soul that she herself should chant the next six verses in her turn, in praise of them just as they had chanted to her honor. Then she, in her usual fashion, making sweet music on the instrument of the sweetest heart of Jesus Christ, made resound to the praise of heavenly Jerusalem: "O happy land! How great its bliss"[11] and the five subsequent verses. At every single word of those verses unspeakable joys seemed to be renewed for all the saints.

10. When this was finished, the Lord Jesus her tender bridegroom sweetly caressed her and made resound with sweet music those two verses, that is, "Here in this vale of misery"[12] and "its days / Of earthly exile past"[13] and so on. And during this, like a kindly teacher or rather a most loving father* instructing his daughter, he taught her how, by concentrating more frequently on things divine in this life, she should deserve eternal joys. Then all the choirs of angels, presenting the prayers of the church, sang together, "These praises, <sounding loud and clear, The church now imitateth here>"[14] and so on. All the saints, joining in these praises, offered so great a pontiff loud praises to God's glory, in combined jubilation joining in the remaining verses. Meanwhile the most blessed father Augustine, in a way beyond speech, or rather beyond thought, in wonderfully irradi-

*see RB Prol. 1

11. *Beata illa patria*; opening of verse 4 of the sequence, trans. Wrangham, *Liturgical Poetry*.

12. *Hoc in hac valle misera*; opening of verse 9 of the sequence, trans. Wrangham, *Liturgical Poetry*.

13. *Quo mundi post exilia*; from verse 10 of the sequence, trans. Wrangham, *Liturgical Poetry*.

14. *Harum laudum praeconis / Imitatur ecclesia*; from verse 11 of the sequence, trans. Wrangham, *Liturgical Poetry*.

ating the whole circumference of heaven with the splendors of heavenly glory was rejoicing in new and joyful delights. Indeed, in response to his prayers at the last two verses, that is, "To follow where his steps precede" and so on,[15] the Lord, as if about to give effect to those words, raised his hand and bestowed a generous blessing on all those extolling that bishop with devout praises.

15. *Hujus sequi vestigia*; from the last verse of the sequence, trans. Wrangham, *Liturgical Poetry*.

CHAPTER FIFTY-ONE

THE NATIVITY OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

1. On the illustrious feast of the Nativity of the most blessed Virgin,[1] <Gertrud> had recited the same number of Hail Marys as the days that the illustrious Star of the Sea had grown in her mother's womb.[2] Devoutly offering them, she asked her what those people who recited the angelic salutation to her honor the same number of times with similar devotion deserved from her kindliness. The most kindly Virgin replied, "I declare that this is their reward: they will share with me eternally in heaven with special delight all the joys that I have blessedly received, and that I still receive, continually renewed, from each and every virtue to which the blessed and glorious Trinity has day by day suitably fitted my soul according to its supreme pleasure."

2. Then, during the antiphon *Hail, glory <of virgins>*,[3] heaven seemed to open and holy angels set down

1. September 8.

2. In one manuscript an early marginal note reads in Latin, "that is, 276"; in the LSG the Virgin commands Mechtild to recite 277 *Aves*, "the number of days I was in my mother's womb" (LSG I.29).

3. *Ave decus virgineum, ave jubar aethereum*; "Hail, virginal glory, hail, etherial radiance"; antiphon at Vespers, more usually for the feast of the Conception of the Virgin.

in the midst of the choir a high and lofty throne, on which was sitting the glorious empress of heaven, in supreme glory and honor. With wonderful gentleness and amiability she showed that she was about to receive with courtesy the prayers of the community during that feast. Now the holy angels, reverently surrounding and upholding that throne, solemnly served their Lord God's most courteous mother with joy. The host of blessed spirits, too, joined both the choirs of those singing psalms, praising with them the queen of glory in each and every word they sang. It also seemed that before each person stood an angel, each one bearing in his hands branches, beautiful with springtime verdure. As each word was pronounced, these branches were producing flowers and fruits of varied colors, according to the diversity of the individual devotions. Now when everything was finished, each angel carried his branch to the virgin mother with great joy, reverently arranging them around the throne on which she was sitting, to the increase of her singular and glorious beauty. Then <Gertrud> said to the Mother of God, "Alas! loving mother, that I, unworthy as I am, do not deserve to take part in these blessed choirs of those singing psalms." The kindly Virgin replied: "Your virtuous will fulfills all your obligations, and that devout intention with which in your usual fashion you concentrated on Vespers to my honor through the sweet-sounding instrument of my sweetest son's heart far exceeds all physical exertion. To prove this, I shall stretch out with my own hand the branch assigned to you, made lovely with most beautiful flowers and most delightful fruits of your virtuous intention, before the ever-worshipful Trinity for its pleasure and supreme delight."

3. Now during Matins she perceived in spirit how the angels were arriving, bringing the flowers and fruits of the various intentions and devotions of the community

that they had gathered together, and were offering them most fittingly to the virginal mother. The greater the difficulty of each person's toil, the more lovely and beautiful these flowers and fruits looked; the purer the intention and devotion had been, the sweeter they became. Then at the *Gloria* of the fourth response she was praising the omnipotence of God the Father, worthy of unspeakable praise, and the stunning wisdom of God the Son, and the astonishing goodness of the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete. By these the ever-worshipful Trinity had the power, the knowledge, and the courtesy to create the Virgin full of all grace to assist our salvation, and so generously to impart to her overabundance of the divine blessedness. Rising up and reverently standing in the sight of the most blessed Trinity, the glorious mother seemed devoutly to implore that the divine omnipotence, wisdom, and goodness should lavish on <Gertrud> as much grace as it is possible for a human being to receive in this life. The worshipful Trinity courteously gave heed to her petition and generously endowed <Gertrud's> soul with a super-celestial blessing. From its power she was, as it were, sprinkled all over with sweetest dew.

4. And while the antiphon *How beautiful you are*[4] was being sung, she was repeating it on behalf of the Son of God to the praise of his lofty mother. Courteously accepting this in accordance with his sweet kindness, and honoring her in return with a movement of his head as if in thanks, the most loving Only Begotten of God said to her, "At a suitable time, according to the royal magnificence of my divine liberality, I shall repay you

4. *Quam pulchra es, amica mea, quam pulchra es et decora; oculi tui columbarum*; "How beautiful you are, my love, how beautiful and lovely you are; your eyes are doves' eyes"; antiphon for Matins of the feast of the Nativity of the Virgin; see Song 4:1.

for that honor that you have shown to my most sweet mother on my behalf." Then during the antiphon *For the birth <of the most holy Virgin> is at hand*,[5] at the phrase "May she intercede for our sins," the Lord's mother seemed reverently to present her son with a charter, brought her by the ministry of angels, in which the same words, that is, "May she intercede," were written with letters of gold. To this he gently answered, "From my omnipotence, reverend Mother, I have granted you the power to make propitiation, in whatever way pleases you, for the sins of all who devoutly invoke the assistance of your loving-kindness."

5. During Mass, while the lines "Pray, Virgin, that we <may be made worthy of that heavenly bread>" were being sung in the sequence "Hail, bright <star of the sea,>"[6] the glorious Virgin turned to her son with clasped hands and calm eyes, and seemed to be praying for those invoking her. At her prayers the Lord protected them all by his divine blessing with the sign of the saving cross and prepared them to receive worthily and keep safe the life-giving sacrament of his Body and Blood. Now at that verse "Hear us, <for your son honors you by denying you nothing,>"[7] the glorious Virgin appeared to sit down by her son on the lofty throne, and <Gertrud> said to her, "Mother of Mercy, why are you not praying for us?" The blessed Virgin replied, "In my

5. *Adest namque nativitas sacratissimae virginis . . . ; ipsa intercedat pro peccatis nostris*; "For the birth of the most holy Virgin is at hand . . . ; may she intercede for our sins"; antiphon for Matins of the feast of the Nativity of the Virgin.

6. *Ora, virgo, / nos illo pane coeli dignos effici*, from stanza 9 of the sequence *Ave, praeclara maris stella*, "Hail, bright star of the sea," composed by Hermannus of Reichenau, ca. 1050.

7. *Audi nos, / nam te Filius / nihil negans honorat*; stanza 12 of the sequence.

heart I am speaking to the heart of my beloved on behalf of you all." Then when the same verse was repeated, the royal Virgin stretched out her slender hand toward the convent and arose, as if drawn by their desires; together with the community she stood before the son to implore him. The imperial Son, kindly rising up before her in his turn, at the following verse, "Jesu, save us, <for whom your virgin mother prays,>"[8] first bent his knee toward the community, saying, "I am ready to grant all your desires."

6. Then, while <Gertrud> was taking pleasure, in the glory of that solemnity, in walking around and meditating, and was finding that her heart was not greatly engaged, she said to the Mother of God, "As there is an infinite number of things to delight the minds of those who honor the glory of your worshipful assumption, I wish your loving-kindness would also teach me what in particular the angels in heaven honor on the feast of your Nativity, for this might stimulate our devotion too on earth." To this the blessed Virgin replied, "The holy angels in celestial glory now ponder with inconceivable happiness those ineffable joys that they had for those nine months during which I was growing in my mother's womb, when each in his way provided devoted service for my growth. For the holy angels, contemplating in the mirror of the Trinity the unique dignity of my most noble body that was being formed, and how the Lord was intending to bestow salvation on the whole world through me, rejoiced to serve for this purpose with all their might, and ennobled the air and all aspects of creation that, by divine grace, were nurturing me in the womb. The archangels, too, recognizing in the mirror of divinity

8. *Salva nos, / Jesu, / pro quibus Virgo Mater te orat*: stanza 13 of the sequence.

the sublimity of divine knowledge and intimate union to which my soul was being fitted beyond any human or even angelic capacity, unwearyingly provided their service in exultation. Similarly the other orders, too, provided most devoted service with all their might in those privileges in which they knew I was to be like them, and with immense joy they took pleasure, to the praise and glory of the Creator, in encouraging me. Now they are rewarded for such loyalty and rejoice forever in heaven."

7. At Compline, while during *Hail, queen <of mercy,>*[9] she was lamenting her neglect of the Lord, having never served his mother with due reverence. Desiring that the Lord would compensate her for this, she was eager to concentrate on that antiphon through the heart of Jesus Christ. The Lord promptly sent out as many golden pipes from his heart toward the heart of the virgin mother as the services that she wished she had shown his mother. Through each and every one of these pipes resounded the tenderness of filial love that the Lord Jesus felt deeply for his sweetest mother, and through this every neglect of <Gertrud's> was discharged.

8. And when during those words, "Ah, then, our advocate,"[10] she was calling the most kindly mother to her aid, she saw the glorious mother bend toward her, as if drawn by powerful cords. Through this she understood that as often as anyone calls on her, devoutly naming her as their advocate, her maternal loving-kindness is so aroused by this name that she is quite unable to prevent herself from paying kindly heed to the prayers of that

9. *Salve, regina misericordiae*: antiphon at Compline between the Saturday before Trinity Sunday and the Friday before the first Sunday in Advent.

10. *Eia ergo advocata nostra*: from the *Salve regina.*

person. At that phrase "<turn> your merciful eyes,"[11] the most blessed Virgin gently caught her son's chin and made him bend toward the earth, saying, "These are my most merciful eyes, which I can bend beneficially toward all those who call upon me; from them they gain in addition most abundant fruit of eternal salvation." From this she received this instruction from the Lord, that at least once a day she should call upon his most blessed mother by means of those two phrases, that is, "Ah, our advocate" and "those your merciful eyes," in the certainty that through this she should obtain powerful solace at the hour of her death.

9. Then she offered the most blessed Virgin a hundred and fifty Hail Marys, recited in her honor, praying that she would deign to be present at the hour of her death with her maternal loving-kindness. And suddenly all the words that she had recited appeared in the form of golden pennies, laid out before the seat of the Judge, and entrusted by him to his mother. The mother, kindly accepting them, like a most faithful steward put them aside under seal for the profit and comfort of her soul. By her most diligent care she was ensuring that when <Gertrud> went forth from this world, she would win special consolations and reliable assistance for her before the strict Judge, in return for everything offered her. And she understood that when anyone entrusts the end of her life to the special prayers of a particular saint, those prayers are immediately brought before the tribunal of the Judge, and God appoints that saint to whom they were entrusted as their advocate, so that from them he may provide those devoted to him with good things.

11. *illos tuos misericordes oculos ad nos converte*: from the *Salve regina.*

CHAPTER FIFTY-TWO

THE DIGNITY OF THE HOLY CROSS

1. On the day of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross,[1] while she was bowing to show reverence to the tree, the Lord said to her, "Consider that I hung upon the cross no longer than from Sext until Vespers and have exalted it with such great honor, and from that reckon up the blessings with which I have determined to reward those hearts in which I repose for very many years." When she replied, "Alas, Lord, that I have allowed you to have such little pleasure in my heart!" the Lord answered, "What pleasure did I have on that cross? But my generous loving-kindness, by which I chose it above others, led me to honor it. And so in the same way I shall reward those whom I have chosen with generous loving-kindness."

2. Then while she was taking part at Mass, the Lord instructed her with these words: "Consider what kind of example I offer my chosen in such honoring of the cross. For I conferred far greater honor on my cross, crown of thorns, spear, and nails, which had served me for suffering,[2] than on other things that served me in my earthly life for bodily comfort, such as the basins in which I was washed in my childhood and such like. For I desired that my special friends should be willing

1. September 14.
2. Reading *poenam* rather than *hoc* with SCh.

to imitate me in this: that for the sake of my honor and their own salvation they should be willing to show more love toward their enemies than toward their benefactors, since from this they can obtain incomparably greater profit. But when they are wounded by their enemies, if out of human weakness they neglect to respond at once with benefits, it would be a praiseworthy sacrifice and acceptable to me if at least after a little while they would take pains to repay their enemies with benefits, just as the cross of my passion, after being hidden in the ground for a certain length of time,[3] was exalted." And the Lord added, "Also I especially value the cross out of love for human salvation, for through it I won the redemption of the human race for which I longed with all my strength, just as the devout sometimes look with greater affection on those places or times in which they were deemed worthy to receive greater gifts of spiritual grace."

3. Then she was moved by a great desire to obtain some relics from the Lord's cross, so dear to him, so that by holding them in reverence she might be regarded with sweeter love by the Lord. The Lord said to her, "If you would like to have relics that can attract my heart most strongly toward the one who holds them, then read through the text of my passion, and carefully consider in it what words I spoke with great love. Write them down and keep them instead of relics, and by frequently meditating on them be confident that from them, rather than from other relics, you best deserve my grace. For even if you had not been instructed through my inspiration, you could consult your reason: when a friend wants to

3. "The precious wood of the cross lay hidden underground for over two hundred years and was rediscovered by Helena, mother of Constantine" (*Golden Legend*, trans. Ryan, 1:278).

remind his friend of their past friendship, he usually says, 'Remember that love that you felt when you were sitting in that place, or when you were dressed in those clothes.' From this you can be confident that the most worthy relics that one could have on earth are the words of my most kindly heart's sweetest love."

4. And while she was beseeching the Lord's help to begin on that very day the fast prescribed by the Rule that is observed by religious for half the year,* the Lord most courteously replied, "If anyone, prompted by zeal for the religious life, voluntarily offers to keep the fast prescribed by the Rule for love of me, and through this desires not his own glory but mine, even though I have *no need of* your *goods*,* compelled nonetheless by my own kindliness I welcome this as the emperor welcomes his faithful vassal's offer to furnish the table most generously with food every single day at his own expense. But let us suppose that in due course this person happened to relax the observance of the fast a little, purely on account of obedience and necessity, with reluctance, and in the fervor of a virtuous will felt his mind so raised up toward me by this that he would most willingly fast for the sake of my love, but nonetheless for my sake he courteously subjected himself to the will of his superior, in union with that humility with which I submitted to men on earth, to the Father's praise. This is as welcome to me as when a friend welcomes his dearest friend, placing him at table by his side and inviting him to eat with such charming friendliness, saying he will taste no mouthful unless <the other> has eaten first; in this way he charms him at every single course, mouthful by mouthful. But when it happens that from fervor of spirit he is so distracted in the strict observance of the fast that he unknowingly disobeys his superior's instructions and then comes to his senses and repents, determining

*RB 41:6

*See Ps 15:2

to be careful in the future, I courteously forgive that person, just as the emperor on the field of battle forgives his faithful vassal who is strenuously fighting against enemies on his behalf, if he has been momentarily and unexpectedly wounded, but without any serious harm."

5. On the day of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, when during Mass she was again offering the Lord at the elevation of the cup the past trouble of the community,[4] she received this reply: "I shall drink—indeed I shall most certainly drink—this cup that the fervor of devotion and your desires have sweetened so much for me that as often as you offer it to me, I shall never cease drinking until you have me completely drunk, ready to hear all your prayers." And when she said, "Lord, how could we proffer this to you?" she was taught that any who, meditating on their wretchedness, offer it to the Lord to his eternal praise, and regret that they have not longed fervently for the Lord as is fitting, and decide that, if it were possible, they would willingly bear in their heart every torment that ever the human heart can have in desiring the Body of the Lord, then they offer the Lord their God the cup of a drink more welcome to him than sweetness of nectar and balm.

6. Anyone can do the same when held back from communion or some other service of God, by saying, "O torrent from the living source! O aromatic savor of divine sweetness! O most delicious drunkenness of all blessedness! Look! I drink to you in the fullness of your being a droplet of my wretched poverty. Because of it I sorrow so long (but less than is right), and have ever sorrowed, that I am restraining my starving soul from your sumptuous feasts since of my own free will,

4. Probably the interdict that was imposed on the community a little before AD 1296; see III.16.1 and *LSG* I.27.

alas, I block the path of your grace by my own vice! And now, creator and re-creator[5] of my substance, you who alone have the power to do all that is impossible to your highest praise, grant that my heart may be in perfect harmony with what I say. For I would willingly contain up to the day of my death every anguish of the desires that the human heart has ever suffered for your love in following you, from the beginning of the world until its end, so that I might provide you with my soul as a more worthy shelter, and in addition might make reparation to you that the unattainable worth of your grace is manifested again and again so incalculably to those who are so ungrateful and unworthy."

5. See Anselm, *Proslogion*, 14, and *Meditationes* 7 and 11.

CHAPTER FIFTY-THREE

ON ANGELS: THE FEAST OF MICHAEL THE ARCHANGEL

1. One day, when the feast of the Archangel Michael was near, she was about to communicate, mindful of the most courteous service of all the other blessed spirits bestowed on her by divine generosity, unworthy enough as she was. Wishing to recompense them, she offered the Lord that same life-giving sacrament of the Body and Blood, saying, "In honor of your great princes, most loving Lord, I offer you this noble sacrament to their eternal praise and to the increase of their joy, glory, and blessedness." Then the Lord, drawing into his divine nature the sacrament offered him, and uniting it to himself, in a wonderful and ineffable way distributed to the blessed angels such unspeakable pleasures from it that, if they had not possessed any blessedness before, they would be seen to rejoice from these plentifully enough and to abound with all delights by divine grace. Then the holy angels knelt down before her, rank by rank, with great reverence and said, "Indeed you have justly honored us with such an offering, for we are concerned for you with especial love." And the order of angels said, "We are vigilant and concerned for your protection by day and night with unspeakable joy, and we do not allow you to leave anything undone that would suitably prepare you for your bridegroom."

2. Then, rendering devout thanks to both the Lord and the blessed spirits for such service, she was also longing to know the holy angel assigned her for her protection by the Lord from among the others. And suddenly she saw one like a most illustrious prince, adorned with ornaments so wonderful that they could not be described by comparisons with visible things. He was standing at the rear between God and her soul, embracing the Lord with one arm and her soul with the other, with the greatest reverence and most refined affection. Gently he said, "With daring born of the long and habitual intimacy by which I often bring God the bridegroom down to this soul and lift her up to him in spiritual jubilation, I dare to come closer." Then she offered him the special devotions that she had rendered to his honor. Receiving them with immense joy, he offered them to the ever-worshipful Trinity in the form of most beautiful roses. Then the archangels, gently greeting her soul, said, "We are eager to reveal to you unceasingly, with most intimate gentleness, all the secrets of the divine mysteries that, in the mirror of divine knowledge, we judge to be more profitable for you according to the capacity of your understanding, O excellent bride of Christ." The virtues, too, said, "We devoutly serve you in all in which you increase the praise and glory of your Lord and ours by meditation, writings, and words, in all these always faithfully helping you and spurring you on to greater efforts."

3. The dominions, too, declared, "Since *the King's honor loves judgment** and headlong love is not bridled by reason,[1] as often as it delights the Lord *the King of glory** to linger and take his pleasure on the couch of

*Ps 98:4

*Ps 23:7-10

1. Bernard of Clairvaux, SC 9.2.

your soul, and she in turn is borne toward him by the motions of love, for a while we show him on your behalf the reverence due to his magnificence, lest anything that befits his imperial glory should be neglected." The principalities said, "We always strive with all our might to present you most beautifully adorned in queenly garments of virtues to the King of kings, the Lord, according to his heart's delight." The powers said, "Since we know your beloved is happily united with you, we are eager to beat back continually all obstacles, both inner and outer, that could disturb your charming conversations, in which the whole court of heaven rejoices and the whole church is blessed. For in the sight of God a single loving soul is worth more than twelve thousand souls that do not love."

4. Then her soul gave devout thanks to all those most blessed spirits and also to the Lord God for these and for many other things that could be added, if human weakness did not prevent it. May everything be entrusted to the divine loving-kindness, to whose knowledge alone all things appear plain.

CHAPTER FIFTY-FOUR

THE FEAST OF THE ELEVEN THOUSAND VIRGINS

1. On the night of the feast of the Eleven Thousand Virgins,[1] while the verse "Behold, the bridegroom is coming"[2] was being frequently chanted, inspired by this she finally said to the Lord, "O desirable Lord, since I have now heard so many times, 'Behold, the bridegroom is coming,' tell me how you will come and what you will bring us." The Lord answered, "I am already working with you and in you. Where is your lamp?" She replied, "Look, my Lord, I offer you my heart instead of a lamp." And the Lord said, "And I shall fill it to overflowing with the oil of my divine heart." To this she said, "Where then shall I find a rush?" The Lord replied, "The rush burning steadily for me will be your devout intention, which you must direct toward me in your works."

2. Now while the response, "<Author> of true modesty," was being sung and at that phrase "hope and crown of virgins,"[3] she was thanking God for the virgins' merits

1. October 21.

2. *Ecce, sponsus venit: exite obviam ei*; verse for Matins of the feast of the Eleven Thousand virgins; Matt 25:6.

3. *Verus pudicicie auctor et custos virginitatis, qui ex virgine natus multos excitasti ad sanctum amorem castitatis animos; qui es perpes corona virginum per merita earum nos adiuva*; "True author of modesty and guardian of virginity, who, born

and for every grace lavished on them, she saw all the virgins standing before the throne. For each grace received from God they were sending out in thanksgiving
*Rev 4:10 a ray of splendor toward the one *sitting on the throne*.* Receiving each ray, the Lord was sending them all out to the soul of the woman who was giving him thanks for the virgins. From this she perceived that whenever someone thanks God for some saint, from that saint's reward the Lord multiplies grace in the soul of the one who has rendered thanks for him.

3. Now while the response "The kingdom of the world" was being sung, at that phrase "whom I have seen, whom I have loved,"[4] there came to mind someone who she often heard was tormented by her desire to see God. So she said to the Lord, "Kindly God, when will you condescend to comfort that soul so that she could chant this response with joy?" The Lord replied, "To see me and love me, to believe in me in this way—such a thing is good, because no one can desire such things without profit. Consequently when any soul desires to achieve this, and is prevented by human weakness, my human nature immediately approaches my divine nature on behalf of its sister, that is, the human soul, and receives this blessing by right of inheritance until that

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of a virgin, inspired many souls to the love of chastity; you who are the perpetual crown of virgins, help us through their merits"; response at Matins for the feast of the Eleven Thousand Virgins (the Latin here reads *spes et* for *perpes*).

4. *Regnum mundi et omnem ornatum saeculi contempsi propter amorem domini mei Jesu Christi, quem vidi, quem amavi, in quem credidi, quem dilexi*; "The kingdom of this world and all worldly adornment have I despised for the love of my lord Jesu Christ, whom I have seen, whom I have loved, in whom I have believed, whom I have esteemed": response from the Common of Virgins.

person, released from the flesh, is able to receive it herself and enjoy eternal delight."

4. On another night, while the response "The kingdom of the world" was being sung, at that phrase "for the love for my Lord," she felt and experienced the divine heart moved to its very marrow by the devotion of those chanting the response at that moment. They did so with such piercing sweetness that, in the presence of God the Father and all the saints, the Son of God himself, Christ Jesus *our flesh and our brother*,* broke out in these words: "Today I truly declare that I owe these women a reward for the faithful service they gave me to the best of their ability." And at that word *Jesu*, which is interpreted as "salvation," the Lord professed that he now owed them the effectuation of every salvation that they had ever desired from childhood but that they had been denied up to now, his fatherly providence ordaining and disposing, until the proper and predestined time. At that word *Christ,* which means "anointed," the Lord testified that he owed them recompense for every request that they had desired from him that he had put off bestowing on them until then. At these two verses, "whom I have seen" and "whom I have loved," he openly testified before God the Father and all the saints that for his love they had proved their catholic faith by righteous deeds, and at these two verses, "in whom I have believed, whom I have esteemed," he professed that they had cleaved to him with firm hope and perfect charity. Then she said, "Woe is me! What then will you do, Lord, for those women who are not in choir right now?" The Lord replied, "I have drawn to myself the prayers of all those who have ever taken pleasure in this response and have united them to the community here present, and together with them have blessed them in the same way."

*see Gen 37:27

5. She said, "If they can win such great good with so small an act of devotion, what harm befalls the negligent, since they can so easily make up for what they have neglected?" The Lord replied, "When the emperor generously lavishes rewards and gifts on one of his nobles, and in addition adorns him with precious garments, when he returns from the emperor everyone will know that he has been generously invested and truly honored. However, if he neglects to care for the good things bestowed on him, he exposes himself to poverty and runs the risk of loss. Nonetheless the kindly king does not take away the clothing that his royal generosity had conferred on him. Similarly, when I dispense such magnificent blessings for so small an act of devotion, people are afterward bound to exert themselves the more assiduously in such things, and if they neglect to do so, they certainly lose the fruit of those good things. But nonetheless the beauty of my generous goodness, with which I have freely benefited them, will forever be apparent in them to my praise and glory." She said, "And how should they exert themselves in such things, when this revelation and others like it have perhaps never reached them?" The Lord replied, "Those who perceive these things are obliged to exert themselves the more assiduously by imitation, for certainly I do allow some inkling of such things to come to their attention. Let them know beyond a doubt that through that knowledge they are bound the more to thanksgiving and eagerness for imitation. Consequently, if out of laziness they knowingly neglected <to care for> the benefits bestowed on them, whether communally or individually, with devout thanksgiving and eagerness for imitation, they should know that they run the risk of eternal damnation as a result."

6. On another occasion, during the same response, there appeared a pack of demons before both the choirs

that were singing, and each demon seemed to offer the community diverse worldly adornments and various vain inventions. Now when the convent was singing with all its heart, "I have despised the kingdom of the world and all the ornaments of the world," that whole pack of demons was promptly confounded, like mad dogs drenched with cold water, and quickly ran off. Through this she grasped that, whenever someone declares with devout heart that she despises the kingdoms of the world and from the depths of her heart despises similar things that the devil offers her to tempt her, the devil's strength is promptly weakened and broken, so much so that he never again dare assault that person on the grounds on which she has once courageously resisted him and, by resisting, has defeated him.

CHAPTER FIFTY-FIVE

THE FEAST OF ALL SAINTS

1. On the feast of All Saints,[1] she recalled in spirit unspeakable mysteries concerning the glory of the ever-worshipful Trinity and how the blessed and glorious Trinity, in itself without beginning and without end, overflowing with all sweetness, delight, and blessedness, dispenses joy, glory, and eternal blessedness to all the saints. But hampered by human weakness, she could not unfold to human understanding anything about those things that she had so clearly perceived in the mirror of the divine brightness, except for those few that she could expound only with difficulty by fits and starts, using some comparison.

2. *The Lord of Hosts, the King of glory*,* appeared in the likeness of a powerful head of a household who is making a great feast for all his lords and nobles and has invited along his friends and neighbors. For he, who is the fount of life, source of perpetual light,[2] author of all goodness[3] and satisfying satiety[4] of the angels,

*Ps 23:10

1. November 1.

2. *Fons vitae et origo lucis*: verse for Matins of the Common of Virgins.

3. See *Eterne deus omnium misericordiarum ac totius bonitatis auctor*; "Eternal God of all mercies and author of all goodness": collect from the Gelasian Missal (now used as the collect for the Third Sunday in Lent): see L. C. Mohlberg, with Leo Eizenhofer and P. Siffrin, eds., *Liber Sacramentorum Romanae Aecclesiae Ordinis Anni Circuli: Cod. Vat. Reg. Lat. 316/Paris Bibl. Nat 7193, 41/56*, Sacramentum Gelasianum (Rome: Herder, 1960).

4. See *ipse Deus fons omnium bonorum est insatiabilis satians satietas*; "God, fount of all good things and satisfying satiety that cannot be satisfied"; Honorius of Autun, *Elucidarium*, PL 172:1171C.

seemed to have placed some of the faithful, still on earth as members of the church militant, among the choirs of saints, already triumphant in heaven, according to the worthiness of their merits, because of the reverence and devotion with which the church was observing the feast of All Saints on that day. For example, those who were lawfully married and assiduous in good works in the fear of God were seen joined to the holy patriarchs. Those who deserved to know the secrets of God's mysteries were seen added to the holy prophets. Those who devoted themselves to preaching and holy teaching were seen to be included with the blessed apostles. And so was it with the others.

3. She also learned in particular that the order of religious serving God under regular obedience to the Rule was connected to the choir of holy martyrs. For just as holy martyrs receive both a special beauty and a capacity for inconceivable delight in that part of the body in which they suffered for the Lord, so religious too, for each and every pleasure that they have denied themselves in anything whatsoever, as in sight, taste, hearing, walking, or speaking and the like, are made equal to the merits of the holy martyrs and receive a similar reward with them in heaven. For although no persecutor sheds their blood, nonetheless they are eager to cut off their own will,* which is greater, offering in some way by continual abstinence a daily sacrifice of confession to the Lord God in *the odor* of wonderful *sweetness*.*

*see RB Prol. 3

*Eph 5:2

4. Then as she was about to receive communion, wishing to pray for the church but lacking enthusiasm, she besought the Lord that, if he thought it praiseworthy that she should pray for the church, he would also provide her with enthusiasm for praying. Immediately she saw various colors: the whiteness of virginal chastity, the purple of confessors and religious, the rosy flower of

martyrdom, and other colors symbolizing the merits of the saints. Striving to reach the Lord by her own efforts, she was thinking that among them she did not gleam with the beauty of any color. At the prompting of the Holy Spirit *who teaches human beings knowledge*,* she began to thank God from the depths of her heart's affection for all those whom his grace has ever elevated to the rank of virginal dignity. She prayed that, through the love with which he deigned to become the Virgin's son for our sake, he would deign to preserve all whom he had chosen in the church for that dignity in true purity of heart and body, to his own praise and glory. And immediately she saw her own soul shining with whiteness like that of the virgins. *Ps 93:10

5. Then she thanked the Lord for the holiness and perfection of all confessors and religious in whom the Lord has ever been pleased from the beginning. She prayed that the Lord would preserve anyone still fighting in the church under the habit of religion and strengthen them in all good until a blessed death. And immediately the beauty of purple was also added to her soul. Similarly, when by thanking the Lord for each group of saints she was praying for the increase and progress of the church, her soul seemed adorned with the splendor of whatever color marked out that particular group. Finally, when she was giving thanks and praying the more passionately for the lovers of God, her own soul seemed enveloped with a golden cloak. And when she stood in the sight of the Lord wonderfully adorned with the beauty of the varied merits of the church, delighting in her beauty he said to all the saints, "Look! Here she is *in gilded clothing surrounded with variety*."* And thus with outstretched arm he laid her to rest on his breast, as if she could not stand for overflowing delights.* *Ps 44:10 *see Song 8:5

6. Then since the moment to receive communion was imminent and she felt great weakness, she said to

the Lord, "How, O most loving, shall I now be able to rise up for you, Lord God, truly *my savior*,* as you come to me in this sacrament, since my strength will not sustain me and I have not asked anyone to help me?" The Lord replied, "Why do you need human help since *leaning upon* your *beloved** you are sustained by the arms of my divine omnipotence? From that I shall give you sufficient strength to rise up and stand on your own." And thus, with the help of his grace, she who had not been able to stand or walk without the assistance of others for a long time rose up for the Lord's Body on her own in strength of spirit; satisfied by her participation in it she was blessedly made *one spirit* with him.*

*Luke 1:47

*Song 8:5

*see 1 Cor 6:17

CHAPTER FIFTY-SIX

SAINT ELIZABETH

1. On the feast of blessed Elizabeth,[1] while they were singing "Ah, mother, behold us"[2] in the sequence, <Gertrud> was devoutly greeting that blessed woman and praying that she would be mindful of her, unworthy though she was. <The saint> replied, "I behold you in the mirror of eternal brightness,[3] in which there clearly shine all your deeds' intentions." And when she said, "Lady, do you not consider it a detraction from your praise that, in singing on your feast, I am concentrating solely on that One from whom you freely received all those things for which you are praised, as if I were paying no attention to you?" She replied, "Not at all. In fact I find it infinitely more welcome; indeed, by this you soothe my state of mind the more sweetly, just as a musical instrument pleases someone more than the bleating of sheep or lowing of cattle."

1. November 17. Saint Elizabeth of Hungary (1207–1231) was canonized in 1235, less than twenty years before Gertrud was born.

2. From the penultimate verse of *Gaude Sion*, "Rejoice, Sion," a sequence for the feast of Saint Elizabeth widely used in Germany; see *Analecta Hymnica*, vol. 55, ed. Blume, 140, no. 120.

3. See IV.55.1 (and also *O Jesu, speculum claritatis aeternae*, fifth of the so-called Fifteen Oes of Saint Bridget).

CHAPTER FIFTY-SEVEN

SAINT CATHERINE, VIRGIN AND MARTYR

1. On Saint Augustine's day[1] among other things the Lord was explaining to her that sentence "None is found like that man,"[2] and was also showing her the merits of many saints. She also longed to learn something about the glory and merits of the glorious virgin Catherine, dear to her from childhood. The Lord, hearing her prayers, showed her that blessed virgin on a throne raised so high that, if there were no queen in heaven, her glory would seem enough to light up heaven. For there appeared nearby, but below her, those fifty orators whom she guided to heaven after they had been vanquished by the spirit of divine wisdom. They were all holding golden scepters in their hands; the finials, which they laid down on that same virgin's garments, were wonderfully adorning her as if with flowers. Amongst those flowers was shining all the assiduity with which those philosophers had toiled in the acquisition of wisdom, as if embroidered by miraculous workmanship. This symbolized that those labors were adorning the noble virgin because those orators had worked for

1. August 28; see IV.8.2 and IV.50.

2. *Non est inventus similis illi qui conservaret legem excelsi*; "None is found like that man, for he kept the law of the Most High"; antiphon for Lauds of the Common of a Confessor.

empty glory in their hearts, but the blessed virgin tried with the greatest assiduity to convert them with all their wisdom to the grace of faith in praise of their creator. <The Lord> also frequently seemed to bestow delicate kisses on the exalted virgin, and by them, as was said earlier about blessed Agnes, he sent her through his breath every delight that he attracted from the hearts of the chosen who were commemorating that same virgin on earth. From this the crown on her head seemed to blossom again with wonderfully varied flowers, giving wondrous splendor to all those devoted to her.

CHAPTER FIFTY-EIGHT

THE FEAST OF THE DEDICATION OF THE CHURCH

1. When, on the feast of the Dedication of the Church, *The queen of Sheba came to King Solomon* was being read at Matins and, further on, *with precious stones of virtue*,* pierced to the heart she said to the Lord, "Woe is me, most kindly God, how may I, such a little thing, come to you, when I do not see in myself the trace of any virtue whatsoever?" The Lord replied to this, "But do you not know that you are sometimes distressed by the opposition of your detractors?" She said, "I do know, Lord, that—alas—as my faults demand I am often a source of scandal to my neighbors." The Lord said to her, "Then take each and every word of your detractors in the place of virtues and, adorned with them, you shall come to me and I shall kindly welcome you, compelled by my compassionate loving-kindness. And the more your way of life is unjustly criticized, the more fully my heart comes down to you with loving caresses, for through this you become most like me, for I always had opponents in what I did."

*see 1 Kgs 10:1-2

2. Then, during the response "Bless, <O Lord,>"[1] the Lord led her to a place astonishing beyond description,

1. *Benedic, domine, domum istam quam aedificavi nomini tuo, alleluia*; "Bless, Lord, that house that I have built to your name, alleluia"; antiphon for Matins of the feast of the Dedication of the Church; see 1 Kgs 8:44.

that is, the heart of Jesu Christ, which was disposed like a house in which the feast of the Dedication was about to be celebrated. When it seemed to her that she was about to enter, she said to the Lord with inconceivable overflow of delights, "My Lord, if you had led my spirit *into some place on which your feet had stood*,* it would be quite excellent enough for me. But what response shall I attempt to give you for the amazing condescension that you are showing me right now?" To this the Lord replied, "Because you are frequently eager to offer me the more worthy part of your being—your heart—I deem it appropriate that I too should show you my heart to complete your delight. For I am *God, all in all,** strength, life, knowledge, food, clothing, and the other things that a loving soul can desire." Then she said, "It was gift from you, my Lord, whenever my heart could consent to you in something." And the Lord said, "It is natural for me that anyone whom *I go before in blessings of sweetness** I shall also come after in blessings of rewards. And if anyone cooperates with me, so that as a result I may fit him for me according to the good pleasure of my heart, I shall conform myself to him according to every good pleasure of his heart."

*Ps 131:7

*1 Cor 15:28

*see Ps 20:4

3. While she was mentally strolling among these delights, the divine treasure house around her appeared constructed from squared gems of varied color, which seemed bonded together with gold in place of cement. And while she was inspecting them more carefully, she saw a wonderful play of springtime loveliness in each and every one. Through this she understood how in the life to come dignity of spiritual grace in any of the chosen will provide delightful pleasure to all the blessed. For through the deployment of the gems already mentioned she understood the predestination of all the chosen in the divine heart, and that the chosen are bound

to support each other reciprocally, just as in a wall one stone supports another. But through the fact that the bonding of the gems was of gold, she understood that that support of the faithful for each other ought to be provided from charity and purely for God's sake.

4. Another time, on the vigil of the Dedication, like Queen Esther properly adorned with the Lord's help *in royal apparel** of spiritual zeal, she stood before the King of kings himself, the Lord. About *to pray on behalf of her people,** that is, the church, she was welcomed by the true Assuerus himself with so great a display of gentleness that she seemed to have been admitted into the tabernacle of his most sweet heart. And she heard the Lord saying gently to her, "Look, I am showing you all the sweet abundance of my divine heart, from which you can generously distribute to the whole world whatever you wish." Then, as if she were scooping out water from the Lord's heart with her hand, she sprinkled it over the vast crowd of her enemies who at that time had disturbed the <abbey's> estate with their threats. Having done this, she saw that it brought about such an effect in anyone whom she had touched with some tiny drop of the sprinkling that she drew from the Lord's heart, that he should truly suffer compunction, <leading> through true penitence to salvation.

*see Esth 5:1

*see Esth 7:3

5. Then, while praying lovingly for someone, she seemed to pour a good measure, drawn from the Lord's heart, into that person's heart. But immediately after its reception it turned to bitterness in the same person's heart. While she was wondering at this, the Lord helped her in this way: "When someone gives his friend some coins, the one who receives them has the freedom to buy what he likes with them. And since sweet and sour apples can be bought for the same price, some people nonetheless freely choose to buy sour ones, because they

seem to last longer. Similarly when, influenced by the prayers of my chosen, I pour my grace into someone, that grace works in him according to what is more suitable for that person's will. For example, it is more suitable at present for some people to experience various burdens than the sweetness of consolations, and so when I pour my grace into them it is turned into the bitterness of present burdens and tribulations, through which they are fitted more and more for my grace, according to the best pleasure of my divine heart. Although it escapes them at present, the more faithfully they have toiled here, in patiently suffering certain trials for the love of my name, the sweeter their experience will be in the future."

6. Now during Matins, while she was concentrating on God and herself, and the response "I saw the <holy> city <of Jerusalem,>"[2] was being sung, the Lord reminded her of a certain saying that she was quite often accustomed to repeat to people to inspire them to have faith in God. He said, "That you may know and may be the more certain, I shall now show you with what courtesy I receive a faithful soul when, after repenting a transgression and returning to me, it is filled with compunction for the transgression and with determination to avoid it from thenceforth as far as possible, with my help." While he was saying this, the Son of the supreme king, honorably invested with imperial regalia, came before the throne of God the Father. While sweetly chanting the same response in a loud voice, he said, "I saw the holy city of Jerusalem." In these words

2. *Vidi civitatem sanctam Jerusalem novam descendentem de caelo a deo paratam et audivi vocem de throno dicentem: ecce, tabernaculam dei cum hominibus et habitabit cum eis*; "I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven prepared, and I heard a voice from the throne saying: Behold the tabernacle of God with men, and he will dwell with them"; response for Matins of the feast of the Dedication; see Rev 21:2-3.

she perceived the indescribable sweetness with which the divine heart is affected whenever someone remembers with sorrow that through wandering of heart or laxity of speech or of useless actions they have abandoned the Lord their God, who has gone before and followed them with such continual blessings, and decides with longing that in the future they wish to avoid it. As often as anyone does this, the Son of God, affected by the inconceivable pleasure of fresh exultation, sings the same, or similar, words to God the Father.

7. It also seemed to her that after those words, *And I heard a great voice speaking from the throne*, *saying: <Behold>*,* the Son of God inserted one by one those words that the heart stricken with compunction ponders, that is, "Alas! wretch that I am, how have I wasted time in ignoring the Lord God my lover," and the like. And the Son of God, in the role of his human nature, chanted this in deep tones, as if singing a sweet-sounding duet with God the Father, who was chanting most excellently through the music of the divine nature or in the treble, *Behold the tabernacle of God with men*,* as if by arousing them he were provoking to wonder all the heavenly host of blessed spirits. Through this she was allowed to understand that one who is stricken in this way with compunction and proposes from thenceforward amendment of sins and zeal for good works with his whole will is indeed made the tabernacle of God. There, as if in his own house, the Lord condescends to dwell, the loving soul's bridegroom who is blessed forever.

*Rev 21:3

*Rev 21:4

8. Next God the Father, giving a blessing with his own venerable hand, added, *Behold, I make all things new*,[3] intimating through this that, through such

3. *Et ait qui sedebat in throno: ecce, nova facio omnia*; verse for Matins of the feast of the Dedication; Rev 21:5.

compunction and the divine blessing and the most holy life of the Son of God, whatever has been neglected is made good and renewed in the faithful soul. And this is why there is said to be *joy in heaven over one sinner that does penance, more than over ninety-nine just persons who do not need penance*.* For the infinite goodness of God condescends to work on its own initiative such delights in the soul that truly repents. And the Lord added, "When I lead every faithful soul across the boundary of this present life to the palace of heaven on that wonderful road, that is, at the entrance to heaven, among the other pleasures with which I then caress her, I also sweetly chant to her that song already mentioned, that is, 'I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem coming down from heaven.' Through these words, that is, '*I make all things new*,'* instantaneously I pour into her all the delights that I and all the heavenly host have ever experienced at various times from that soul's compunction."

*Luke 15:7

*Rev 21:5

CHAPTER FIFTY-NINE

THE CONSECRATION OF THE CHAPEL

1. After the chapel had been consecrated,[1] while the response "*I saw the <holy> city <of Jerusalem>,*"[2]* was being chanted at Matins, the Lord appeared in the form of a bishop on his throne against the wall facing the altar, gathering his vestments about him, as if he had chosen that place for himself to dwell. While she was looking at this, considering how far away it was from that place that she had herself chosen for prayer, she seemed to be drawn closer to him with great desire. At this the Lord said, "Since *I am he who fills heaven and earth*,* how much more do I fill this building! Do you not know that the place that the arrow pierces is watched more attentively than the place where the bow is drawn? Thus you should know that I act with more powerful love not in that place where I appear physically, but rather in that place where my treasure and the pure and pleasing eye of my divinity[3] exist." And miraculously he touched the holy altar, as if it were beside him, with his outstretched hand, saying, "And this place is here." And

*Rev 21:2

*Jer 23:24

1. This took place on a Sunday and coincided with the feast of Saint Laurence on August 10 (see III.17.1); this must have been in 1287, 1292, or 1298.

2. See IV.58.6, n. 2.

3. See III.30.30.

he added, "Anyone who seeks my grace in hope of salvation will find me the more manifestly in my blessings, and anyone who seeks my love in faith will experience me the more sweetly in their inmost being." Through these words she understood that there is a great distance between those who seek salvation not only of their body but also of their soul according to the inclination of their own will, and those who entrust themselves completely in quiet confidence to the providence of divine love.

2. Again, while "*My house shall be called the house of prayer*"[4]* was being chanted in the Mass, the Lord seemed to touch her breast with his right hand and to burst out in these words, as if from the depths of his heart's affection, "I say to you with pure affection: *Everyone that asks, receives** and so on." And stretching out his arm, he extended his hand turned downwards in the midst of the sanctuary, as if he would hold it there continuously to distribute blessings. Again, while during the week the antiphon *The foundations of this temple*[5] was chanted at the *Benedictus*, there appeared on top of the walls angelic spirits, beautiful and elegantly dressed, who had been assigned to guard the church, to repel the attacks of their enemies. Touching each other with their golden wings, they repeated a sweet song in praise of divinity. One by one they seemed to come down from on high to the depths, to show that they were assiduously visiting their fellow citizens in that place with kindly love and protecting them from all evil.

*Matt 21:13

*Matt 7:8

4. Communion verse for the feast of the anniversary of the Dedication.

5. *Fundamenta templi hujus sapientia sua fundavit deus in quo dominum caeli collaudant angeli*; "By his wisdom God laid the foundations of this temple in which the angels praise the lord of heaven"; antiphon at Lauds for the feast of the anniversary of the Dedication.

3. On the feast of that same Dedication, she was lying in bed during Matins eager to concentrate on the Office, because of what she had received from the Lord as a special gift a few years before: that the nine orders of angels would render in praise and thanksgiving on her behalf whatever, hindered by human weakness, she could not do, and that from this she would experience wonderful delight in spirit, of which much could be said that I have omitted in the interests of brevity. At length she saw a river of extreme purity with rippling waves flowing throughout the breadth of heaven. And just as the sun when it shines casts a beautiful glow on the water for those who contemplate it, so all the ripples of the river sparkled delightfully, as if there were a thousand suns shining in the sky. She understood that that river signified the grace of devotion that she was enjoying at that moment, through the Lord's generosity; the ripples signified all those thoughts that she had directed at God with industrious zeal.

4. Then the King of glory, bending down, dipped into the depths of that river a golden chalice, which he withdrew full to the brim and offered to all the saints. Each one drew from it a draught of new delight and joy, and burst out in praise and thanksgiving for all the graces ever conferred on that soul by the dispenser of all good things.[6] From the bottom of that chalice golden pipes seemed to protrude towards certain people who on this occasion had prompted her to be the more freely available to God, and also towards all those who had entrusted themselves to her prayers. Through these pipes they were

6. *Effusio liberalitatis obtendit umbram; sed bonorum omnium largitor afluentissimus tu es*; "Lavishness makes a pretence of liberality; but you are the most generous dispenser of all good things"; Augustine of Hippo, Conf 2.6.13.

to receive divine consolation. Then her soul said to the Lord, "What good can it do these people that I see and perceive such things, since they do not experience them themselves?" To this the Lord replied, "What good does it do the father of a family that he fills his cellar with wagonloads of wine, whose sweetness he does not taste at every single moment? But nonetheless he could pour out as much wine as he wants as often as he pleases and could drink to satiety. In the same way, when I infuse grace into others at the prayers of my chosen, although they do not immediately experience the taste of devotion, nonetheless at the appropriate time they will experience my condescension more delightfully."

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